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SHAKESPEARE'S SELF



# SHAKESPEARE'S SELF

BY

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To  
**M. T. S.**

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## CHAPTER I

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### BIRTH AND EARLY DAYS

---

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE was born of comfortable yeoman stock, his father being one John, most likely the third son of Richard Shakespeare, farmer of Snitterfield, a village four miles north out of Stratford-on-Avon. This Richard was a tenant of Robert Arden, and died in 1560, four years before the poet's birth. If indeed this Richard were the poet's grandfather, then William had as paternal uncles Henry and possibly Thomas Shakespeare, who held land at Snitterfield. Uncle Henry did not die until 1596, and would, therefore, have been known to nephew Will.

John Shakespeare moved to Stratford-on-Avon in the year 1551. About 1557 he married Mary, the youngest daughter of the aforesaid Robert Arden, who was a well-to-do farmer at Wilmcote, three miles distant from Stratford. Robert Arden had a considerable family, so that on his mother's as on his father's side William had country relatives. Robert himself died in 1556; but his second wife, Anne, or Agnes. Webbe, widow of John Hill, farmer, of Bearley, survived until 1580, when her grandson was in his sixteenth year. On the maternal side there were aunts only to William. We do not know anything of any of these good folk; the sole significance of their existence for us is that Shakespeare had many a country home within walking distance of Stratford which he could visit, and that while a boy and young

man he was afforded many opportunities to study country life.

Mary, his mother, received a considerable inheritance from her father, including a house and about fifty acres of land at Wilmcote, called Ashbies.

To John and Mary Shakespeare were born eight children, namely:—

Joan, baptised September 15th. 1558; died in infancy.

Margaret, baptised December 2nd. 1562; buried April 30th, 1563.

WILLIAM, baptised April 26th, 1564; buried April 25th, 1616.

Gilbert, baptised October 13th, 1566; buried (?) February 3rd, 1611-2.

Ann, baptised September 28th, 1571; buried April 4th, 1579.

Richard, baptised March 11th. 1573; buried February 4th, 1612-3.

Edmund, baptised May 3rd, 1580; buried in Saint Saviour's, Southwark, December 31st, 1607.

Joan, baptised April 15th. 1569; buried November, 1646.

Of his brothers and sisters, one only of the latter survived William, the others, with the exception of the two first, dying at ages which must have given him a heart wrench.

William was born at Stratford-on-Avon.

In April, 1552, we find his father in possession of a home in Henley Street, the route that leads out of the town to Henley-in-Arden. The first mention of him in the borough records is that he was fined twelve pence for allowing a muck-heap to accumulate before his door. There is some doubt as to exactly what occupation he pursued, but whatever it was he flourished for many years, and became an important man in the town. The probability is that he was what we should now call a



general dealer in country produce, doubtless obtaining his supplies from his wife's property and from his many relatives resident near to Stratford. Corn, wool, malt, meat, skins, and leather were, Sir Sidney Lee tells us, included in his merchandise. In October, 1556, the year before his marriage, he purchased further property in Stratford, including another house in Henley Street, alongside that now known as the Birthplace. In 1561 he was elected a chamberlain, which goes to show that he must have been considered a man of some financial capacity.

There is not any conclusive evidence as to the exact date and spot of Shakespeare's birth. April 23rd is near enough for the former, except for the purposes of an astrologer. As for the spot, it was presumably one or other of the houses which his father owned in Henley Street. Tradition points to that one known as "the Birthplace." But it does not matter; he did not derive anything from the precise date or locality of his birth. So we may go on to important matters.

Warwickshire is one of the most typically lovely of English counties, as well as one of the most historically interesting. There is much in it to attract the lover and student of English country life and history. Towns and villages there carry us back to the Middle Ages; Warwick and Kenilworth and others, as well as the place with which we are immediately concerned.

Warwickshire is in the middle of England, peopled with stock that is for the most part Celtic and Angle blood. In considering the influences which the county of his birth would have upon his receptive and impressionable mind, we must not forget that the battles of Evesham and Bosworth were fought not very far from Stratford, the latter no more than eighty years before the dramatist's birth; the country side, which Shakespeare knew so well, teemed with traditions and vague tales of the Wars of the Roses. Warwick Castle was but eight miles distant from his home, and Kenilworth some fifteen. Even without

such early influences as these and others of a like kind, he would doubtless have written the historical plays, but, when at work upon them, the events he described and the personalities who moved amid those happenings must have been very close to him; just as a dramatist to-day would feel far more closely in touch with Waterloo than with Marston Moor. To Shakespeare it was for the most part recent history that he dramatised.

At the date of Shakespeare's birth Stratford-on-Avon was a flourishing market town, with a population of about 2,000, but its welfare greatly declined during his lifetime. It was, as were almost all the towns then, not excepting the metropolis, what we might call a "Garden city." The life there was stirring, picturesque, though to modern notions in many ways dirty and squalid. Halliwell-Phillipps pictures it "with its mediæval and Elizabethan buildings, its crosses, its numerous barns and thatched hovels, its water mills, its dung-hills and fetid ditches, its unpaved walks and its wooden spired church, with the common fields reaching nearly to the gardens of the Birthplace."

Many trades thrived, including that pursued by Bottom, namely, weaving; tanning, saddlery, glove-making, chandlery, soap-making, ironmongery, baking, and other "domestic" manufactures; so that an eager, observant lad could not help storing his mind with the manners, customs and terms of many handicrafts and pursuits.

Then there were the weekly markets and half-yearly fairs, thronged by country folk from near-by and from afar, and no doubt frequented, despite all enactments against them, by wandering vagabonds of all sorts. We know that Autolycus for the most part managed to keep at large, and that Sly, the tinker, roved about the country side, plying his calling and encouraging the brewing industry.

A country town in those days had to be almost entirely self-supporting, or to go out of existence. In the

shops and work-rooms of pewterers, brewers, drapers, bakers, carpenters, painters, and so forth, as well as among the trades already mentioned, the boy Shakespeare would unconsciously pick up many unconsidered trifles, which would sink into the depths of his memory, ready to spring forth when opportunity called for their use.

In short, Stratford was a thriving, busy, bustling little town; by no means sleepy; full of active, alert men and women, workers almost all; a centre of life and trade to the neighbouring villages, in many of which Shakespeare had close relatives.

Both in the ordinary affairs of life and in his work, the dramatist showed throughout his career his love for and full knowledge of his homeland, and a never-sated thirst for the sights and scenes of his boyhood. All his London time he showed keen interest in the doings of his fellow-townsmen and in the local politics of Stratford. In the end he returned there to spend his last days. Stratford was always his home. His contemporaries showed their appreciation of this fact by their never naming him in connection with London's Thames but with the Avon of Stratford.

In many places in his writings, and here and there in his actual vocabulary, can be traced the influence of his Warwickshire experience and memories, stored up in the days of his youth. One striking example is in the Introduction to "The Taming of the Shrew," which is fully dealt with by Sir Sidney Lee in "A Life of William Shakespeare." In the original play, which Shakespeare wrote up, there are not any names or allusions which can be referred to Warwickshire. The Warwickshire man Shakespeare put them in, and, to indulge in a warrantable conjecture, we may take it that the name of the drunken Slie in the old play started the poet's memory working, Sly being a name common in Stratford-on-Avon; with the result that vivid recollections of old and possibly of recent days crowded to his pen. We have the description of Christopher Sly as being "Old Sly's son of Burton Heath," which may fairly be taken as Barton-on-the-

Heath, the home of Shakespeare's Aunt Lambert. Then Sly tells us that he was in debt for liquor to Marian Hacket of Wincot, who had an alehouse "on a heath." Wincot is a name given to no less than three villages in Warwickshire, and in Shakespeare's time a family of Hackets resided in one of them. It will not be out of place to quote here the jingle written by Sir Aston Cokain, some fifty years after "The Taming of the Shrew." The lines were addressed to an inhabitant of Wilmcote:—

*Shakespeare your Wincot ale hath much renowned,  
That fox'd a Beggar so (by chance was found  
Sleeping) that there needed not many a word  
To make him to believe that he was a Lord.*

On July 4th, 1565, father John was appointed an alderman of the borough, and at Michaelmas, 1568, he attained the highest honour within his reach, becoming Bailiff of the town, a post practically equivalent to that of mayor. In 1571 he was Chief Alderman. Then a change came. From 1572 his affairs began to decline; he seems to have become involved in inextricable pecuniary difficulties. Shakespeare would, therefore, remember the highest fortunes of his father, and the gradual and painful downfall.

For many years John Shakespeare was involved in constant legal worries of one kind and another, including those connected with his wife's estate of Ashbies, which was mortgaged to Shakespeare's uncle Lambert. Therein, and in his own frequent legal engagements of various kinds, are to be found ample sources for such legal knowledge as was shown in the plays. I am sceptical as to Shakespeare's having ever been professionally engaged in legal work, in spite of the arguments in support of the other view. Were we to pursue such lines of argument as are usually adopted by commentators with bees in their bonnets we could easily prove Shakespeare to have been:

Soldier, sailor, tinker, tailor,  
Gentleman, apothecary, ploughboy, thief,

in addition to having been a hard-working actor, poet and

playwright. As to his being a gentleman, it is amusing to note some of the claims made by John Shakespeare when applying to the College of Heralds for a coat of arms, in which application he was, it seems, supported, perhaps even egged on, by his son. In the draft grant of 1596 we find this:—

“We therefore being solicited and by credible report informed that John Shakespeare of Stratford upon Avon in the counte of Warwick . . . . (whose parentes and late) ancestors (grandfather) (were) for *his* (valiant and) faithful and . . . . (service advanced and rewarded by the most prudent) prince King Henry the seventh . . . . (of famous memorie sythence which tyme they have continewed at those partes being of good reputation . . . . (and credit: and that the) said John hath (having) maryed (Mary) the daughter . . . . (and one of the heys of Robert Arden of Wilmcote, in the said) counte Esquire . . . .” and so forth. In the second draft John is described as “A Justice of Peace, and was baylefe, officer, and cheffe of the towns of Stratford upon Avon XV or XVI years past.” And in confirmation of the Grant of Arms in 1599 this rigmarole:—“That John Shakespere, now of Stratford upon Avon in the counte of Warwick gent., whose parent *great grandfather* and *late* antecessor, for his faithful and approved service to *the late most prudent prince* King H.<sup>7</sup> of famous memorie, was advanced and rewarded with landes and tenementes given to him in those partes of Warwickshire, where they have continewed by *some* descentes in good reputacion and credit: *and for that* the said John Shakespere having married the daughter and one of the heys of Robert Arden of Wellingcote in the said counte, and also produced *this his* auncient *cote* of arms heretofore assigned to him whylest he was *her* Majesties *officer* and baylefe of that towne . . . .” and so on. Which affords matter rather for entertainment than for enlightenment.

But we may gather from it that John and his son William wished at any rate to be thought men of gentle descent. That they proved their case to the seeming

satisfaction of those innocent folk the Heralds does not convince us of the truth of the above family history.

Of the personality of Shakespeare's mother most unfortunately we do not know anything. She lived to see her son a very prosperous man, occupying a leading position in his native town. But I think we can see in the plays that he fully realised how great and how lasting can be a mother's influence upon her children. A son almost always draws closer to his mother than to his father, learning and imbibing more from her than from him. A son is apt to be more critical of his father than of his mother. Mary Shakespeare was a country woman, the child of a farmer, and I like to believe that her son heard from her many a tale and song of the country side.

Perhaps there may be a memory of childhood days in Sonnet CXLIII. :—

Lo, as a careful housewife runs to catch  
 One of her feather'd creatures broke away,  
 Sets down her babe, and makes all swift despatch  
 In pursuit of the thing she would have stay;  
 Whilst her neglected child holds her in chase,  
 Cries to catch her whose busy care is bent  
 To follow that which flies before her face,  
 Not prizing her poor infant's discontent;  
 So runn'st thou after that which flies from thee.  
 Whilst I thy babe chase thee afar behind;  
 But if thou catch thy hope, turn back to me,  
 And play the mother's part, kiss me, be kind.  
     So will I pray that thou may'st have thy Will,  
     If thou turn back, and my loud crying still.

There were many babes and doubtless much loud crying to be stilled in the Henley Street home. Brother Gilbert was born when William was in his third year; Richard early in 1574, when William was getting on for ten; Edmund in the Spring of 1580. and Joan in 1569. There was the sadness of the death of Ann, who was born in 1571 and who died in 1579.

Whether Shakespeare was fond of his brothers and sisters we do not know, but there is no reason to think otherwise. For my part I do not see much in his writings to show that he was able as a man to put himself in the place of a child. Almost all the children of his imagination are no more than physically-small grown-ups, and from this I think we are justified in deducing that he did not understand little folk. Let us have a look at some of those he has drawn for us. "Love's Labour's Lost" was one of his earliest plays, and was written when memories of childish days were fresher than they would be in the time of his mature work. On the other hand his skill in the delineation of character was immature when he wrote the early play. As a portrait of a boy Moth is very disappointing. Armado's page is shown as no more than a precocious imp. His master calls him "boy," but that is a vague term, giving no clue as to his exact age; possibly the imp may have been a youth. He first appears in Act I., Scene 2. The dialogue scarcely indicates anything of the spirit or the limited experience of boyhood. Here is some of it:—\*

*Arm.* Boy, what sign is it when a man of great spirit grows melancholy?

*Moth.* A great sign, sir, that he will look sad.

*Arm.* Why, sadness is one and the self-same thing, dear imp.

*Moth.* No, no; O Lord, sir, no.

*Arm.* How canst thou part sadness and melancholy, my tender juvenal?

*Moth.* By a familiar demonstration of the working, my tough senior.

*Arm.* Why tough senior? Why tough senior?

*Moth.* Why tender juvenal? Why tender juvenal?

*Arm.* I spoke it, tender juvenal, as a congruent epitheton appertaining to thy young days, which we may nominate tender.

*Moth.* And I, tough senior, as an appertinent title to your old time, which we may name tough.

*Arm.* Pretty and apt.

---

\* The text here, as in most of the quotations, is that of "The Arden Shakespeare."



And so on. This is mere word-chopping, laboured fun-making; it is certainly neither the thought nor the language appertaining to any tender juvenal. But it would not be fair to take Moth as an example of Shakespeare's understanding of and sympathy with children. Nor would much advantage be gained from a study of Rutland in the "Third Part of King Henry VI.," for it is not generally admitted that Shakespeare had any great hand in the writing of this trilogy. But it is worth while quoting the following speech as being absolutely amazing from the lips even of a stage child. Rutland is speaking to Clifford (I., iii., 12):—

So looks the pent-up lion o'er the wretch  
That trembles under his devouring paws;  
And so he walks, insulting o'er his prey,  
And so he comes to rend his limbs asunder.  
Ah! gentle Clifford, kill me with thy sword,  
And not with such a cruel threatening look.  
Sweet Clifford, hear me speak before I die:  
I am too mean a subject for thy wrath;  
Be thou revenged on men, and let me live.

As to the famous nephew of King John, Prince Arthur. He makes his first appearance in Act II., Scene 1, thus addressing Austria:—

God shall forgive you Cœur-de-lion's death  
The rather that you gave his offspring life,  
Shadowing their right under your wings of war:  
I give you welcome with a powerless hand,  
But with a heart full of unstained love:  
Welcome before the gates of Angiers, duke.

Is there any trace of a child's heart or mind in that? Then we come to the belauded scene (Act IV., Scene 1) where Arthur is confronted by Hubert and the executioners. If Arthur were not a boy there could be no denying that this scene is written pathetically. But as a revelation of a boy's mind it is a failure. The following is what Hubert calls innocent prate:—



*Arth.*

Mercy on me !

Methinks no body should be sad but I :  
 Yet, I remember, when I was in France,  
 Young gentlemen would be as sad as night,  
 Only for wantonness. By my christendom,  
 So I were out of prison and kept sheep,  
 I should be as merry as the day is long ;  
 And so I would be here, but that I doubt  
 My uncle practises more harm to me :  
 He is afraid of me and I of him :  
 Is it my fault that I was Geoffrey's son ?  
 No, indeed, is't not ; and I would to heaven  
 I were your son, so you would love me, Hubert.

Making all allowances for poetic drama, Arthur could not have thought that way. Or is this the speech of a child ?

Ah, none but in this iron age would do it !  
 The iron of itself, though heat red-hot,  
 Approaching near these eyes, would drink my tears  
 And quench his fiery indignation  
 Even in the matter of mine innocence ;  
 Nay, after that, consume away in rust,  
 But for containing fire to harm mine eye.  
 Are you more stubborn-hard than hammer'd iron ?  
 An if an angel should have come to me  
 And told me Hubert should put out mine eyes,  
 I would not have believed him.

No one will deny the fineness of the poetry. But both the thought and the utterance are those of a grown man. As so often he did, Shakespeare lost his sense of character when carried away by an emotion which opened the floodgates of his inexhaustible well of poetry.

But worse remains. Here is Arthur's last dying speech :—

The wall is high, and yet I will leap down :  
 Good ground, be pitiful and hurt me not !  
 There's few or none do know me : if they did,  
 This ship-boy's semblance hath disguised me quite.

I am afraid; and yet I'll venture it.  
 If I get down, and do not break my limbs,  
 I'll find a thousand shifts to get away:  
 As good to die and go, as die and stay.

(*Leaps down.*)

O me! my uncle's spirit is in these stones:  
 Heaven take my soul, and England keep my bones!

Boys do not often commit suicide, and when they do their minds are not occupied with such thoughts as:—

Heaven take my soul, and England keep my bones!

It is stage rhetoric of the worst kind.

The only Shakespearean boy who to me is wholly delightful and boyish is Mamillius, in what was one of the dramatist's latest plays, "The Winter's Tale." The first scene of Act II. is very charming; the boy is a boy, thinks as a boy, talks as a boy, despite the poetic diction:—

*Enter Hermione, Mamillius and ladies.*

*Her.* Take the boy to you: he so troubles me,  
 'Tis past enduring.

*1st La.* Come my gracious Lord,  
 Shall I be your playfellow?

*Mam.* No, I'll none of you.

*1st La.* Why, my sweet lord?

*Mam.* You'll kiss me hard, and speak to me as if  
 I were a baby still. I love you better.

*2nd La.* And why so, my lord?

*Mam.* Not for because  
 Your brows are blacker, yet black brows, they say,  
 Become some women best, so that there be not  
 Too much hair there, but in a semicircle,  
 Or a half-moon made with pen.

*2nd La.* Who taught this?

*Mam.* I learned it out of women's faces. Pray now  
 What colour are your eyebrows?

*1st La.* Blue, my lord.

*Mam.* Nay, that's a mock: I have seen a lady's nose  
 That has been blue, but not her eyebrows.

\* \* \* \* \*

*Her.* What wisdom stirs amongst you? Come, sir, now  
I am for you again: pray you, sit by us,  
And tell's a tale.

*Mam.* Merry or sad shall't be?

*Her.* As merry as you will.

*Mam.* A sad tale's best for winter: I have one  
Of sprites and goblins.

*Her.* Let's have that, good sir.

Come on, sit down: come on, and do your best  
To fright me with your sprites; you're powerful at it.

*Mam.* There was a man—

*Her.* Nay, come, sit down; then on.

*Mam.* Dwelt by a churchyard: I'll tell it softly;  
Yond crickets shall not hear it.

*Her.* Come on, then,  
And give't in mine ear.

What was the story? Who knows but that it was one that had been told to young Shakespeare by his mother?

Is there any definite conclusion to be drawn from the fact that the man Shakespeare was out of touch with childishness? I think we may fairly assume that when a boy he stood rather aloof in his play, had other interests than those of his brothers and sisters. Born in 1564, he was older than Gilbert by some two and a-half years; than Ann by seven. So that of the home children Gilbert was the only one of an age likely to be his intimate playmate. What child friends he had we do not know. But may we not imagine him as a youngster fond of rambling in his leisure time about the country side, making the birds and beasts, the trees and flowers, his comrades? Living, too, in a world of make-believings? This is not to imagine him as an extraordinary boy; in the childhood of other writers, for examples, Shelley and Dickens, we find them exhibiting in their childish days what is very usual in genius, precocity. I do not see Shakespeare as a precocious child, but, merely, as somewhat out of touch with other children in regard to his play. This is no more than conjecture, but it is reasonable, for we are justified in judging the boy by what

he became as a man. I do not think that he was in any way *unchildish*; the Sonnet which has been quoted shows that he had felt somewhat deeply as a little child, and had not forgotten. But when he came to depict the emotions of other children in his plays, I do hold that, for the most part, he failed. Dickens, an immeasurably inferior artist, has shown in his work far more understanding of the child mind. True, he often goes astray and yields to his tendency to indulge in appalling melodrama, as in the deaths of Little Nell and Paul Dombey, those two terrible infants. But in many places there are touches which prove that he possessed a wonderful insight into and sympathy with the innocent hearts of children; notably in "David Copperfield." This insight and sympathy were the output of the stores of memories of his own childhood, which remained fresh and stimulating to the end. Dickens was always a boy at heart. I fancy that Shakespeare had a very happy boyhood; the memories of happiness are apt to be more vague and general than those of sorrow. Dickens's childhood was rather sad.

## CHAPTER II

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### SCHOOLING

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IN 1571, when seven years of age, Shakespeare probably entered the Grammar School at Stratford-on-Avon. If he did not do so, there must have been some very urgent and unusual reason for his father keeping him away. That William did go to a Grammar School is almost conclusively proved by various references to school books in the plays. To what other school should he go save to that in his own town? He had, as the son of a Stratford burgher, the right to free education at the Grammar School there, an old foundation that had been reorganised in 1553. Such schools were chiefly intended for the advantage of the children of the citizens of the towns in which they were located.

Before admission to the school, at the age of seven, the boy must be able to read; and it was, we may assume, from his mother or the parson that a lad would gain his first knowledge of letters and words.

We do not know anything of the personality of Shakespeare's masters, or whether they influenced him for good or bad. We have to be content with knowing their names, for I do not think that we can gather anything of their characters from the schoolmasters who make their appearances in the plays. Or, at any rate, we learn no more than that in those days, as in these, schoolboys made fun of any weaknesses and peculiarities displayed by those who taught them.

Shakespeare was under at least two masters: Walter Roche, appointed in 1570, and Simon Hunt, who succeeded him. Maybe more than these two, for we do not know when he left school. There is an interesting article in "The Month" for October, 1917, by the Reverend J. H. Pollen, on Shakespeare's Schoolmasters. Hunt was an Oxford A.B., who in 1578 became a Jesuit, and died at Rome, a Penitentiary, in 1585.

The hours of schooling then were long: in Summer, from 6 to 11, and from 1 to 6; in Winter, from 7 to 11, and from 1 to 5; so that the boy had little leisure for outdoor pursuits of any kind, save in the long Summer evenings and during the holidays. In country schools there were usually holidays at Christmastide and Easter of about a fortnight each. The boys had to provide their own candles for the dark hours. The use of the rod was frequent and harsh with most schoolmasters.

The object of a Grammar School was to instruct the boys in Latin Grammar. Latin was the main matter. The masters were well-educated men, thoroughly competent for their work.

What did Shakespeare learn at school?

He continued to learn to write, in the old-English character, which he always used. He learned Latin, to read it, to write it and to speak it colloquially. Among the works and authors fit for use in a Grammar School, recommended by Charles Hoole in his "A New Discovery of the Art of Teaching Schoole" (1660), are the English Bible; *Sententiæ Pueriles*, being moral excerpts from Latin Authors, ancient and modern; *Æsop's Fables*; the works of Gian Battista Spaignoli Mantuanus, a Carmelite poet, who died in 1516 and to whom Shakespeare makes reference as "good old Mantuan"; the Greek Testament; Terence; various works of Ovid, Tully, Euripides, Horace, Seneca, Plautus and so on.

In Hoole's book there are some refreshingly human touches; as this:—"Neither would I have the scholars

to be so precisely observant of the clock, as just upon the first stroke of it to rush out of the Schoole."

In his "Ludus Literarius," published in 1612, John Brinsley provides us with much useful information concerning the regime and curriculum at the Grammar Schools of his day. He tells us that in the country schools the age of entrance was about seven or eight, and that six is "very soone." Did Shakespeare go "very soone"? As to writing, he remarks that "many of the best Schollars have been wont to write very ill." Accidence and grammar are to be carefully and thoroughly taught; stress is laid on the necessity of teaching a good method of construing and translating from Latin into English, and the other way round. The writing of English themes "full of good matter, in a pure style, and with judgement" is to be encouraged; verse-making, with Ovid among others as exemplar, is also to be practised. Did William write English themes, full of good matter and in a pure style? Did his mother treasure them for long, as mothers are wont to do? Where are they now? But Latin was the principal matter. How did Shakespeare get on with his Latin verses, with Ovid as his master? He certainly loved Ovid and studied him with delight.

We need not trouble ourselves about Ben Jonson's opinion of Shakespeare's classical attainments; but I must quote the great Doctor of the same name: "I always said Shakespeare had Latin enough to grammaticise his English." How delightfully Johnsonian!

For an understanding of Shakespeare's self it is not necessary to know what he was *taught* at school or elsewhere; but it is so, and interesting as well, to observe to what use he put his knowledge.

In "The Return from Parnassus" one of the characters remarks:—"It is my custome in my common talke to make use of my readings in the Greeke, Latin, French, Italian, Spanish poets, and to adorn my oratory with some pretty choice extraordinary sayings." It was a

common habit so to do. Then, as in far later days, gallants loved to affect a depth of learning that they did not possess. I think that we may assume that Shakespeare did not lard his talk with quotations, but he does make his "little Latin" useful in his plays. How much, or how little, was his knowledge of Latin we cannot surely tell, but Jonson would scarcely have said what he did had Shakespeare been known as a profound Latin scholar. But it does not really matter to us whether he read his classics in the originals or in translations, published or unpublished. A classical education is not an essential element in the growth of a poet's mind. It is knowledge acquired from experience, the teacher of the only useful knowledge, that counts; especially emotional experience.

It would be tedious to extract all the references to the classics and to other school books which are in the plays and poems. A small selection will suffice.

"The Merry Wives of Windsor," Act IV., Scene 1. Sir Hugh Evans puts Willy Page through his facings in response to his mother's request that he should "ask him some questions in his accidence." "Come hither, William," says the Welsh parson. "Hold up your head; come." Then:—

- |               |                                                                                 |
|---------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|               | William, how many numbers is there in nouns?                                    |
| <i>Will.</i>  | Two.                                                                            |
| <i>Quick.</i> | Truly, I thought there had been one number more because they say, "Od's nouns." |
| <i>Evans.</i> | Cease your tattlings! What is "fair," William?                                  |
| <i>Will.</i>  | Pulcher.                                                                        |
| <i>Quick.</i> | Polecats! There are fairer things than polecats, sure.                          |
| <i>Evans.</i> | You are a very simplicity 'oman: I pray you, peace.—What is "lapis," William?   |
| <i>Will.</i>  | A stone.                                                                        |
| <i>Evans.</i> | And what is "a stone," William?                                                 |
| <i>Will.</i>  | A pebble.                                                                       |
| <i>Evans.</i> | No, it is "lapis": I pray you, remember in your brain.                          |



*Will.* Lapis.

*Evans.* That is good William. What is he, William, that doth lend articles?

*Will.* Articles are borrowed of the pronoun, and be thus declined, singulariter, nominativo, hic, hæc, hoc.

*Evans.* Nominativo, hig, hag, hog; pray you, mark: genetivo, hujus. Well, what is your accusative case?

*Will.* Accusativo, hinc.

*Evans.* I pray you, have your remembrance, child; accusativo, hung hang, hog.

*Quick.* "Hang-hog" is Latin for bacon, I warrant you.

*Evans.* Leave your prabbles, 'oman.—What is the focative case, William?

*Will.* O,—vocativo, O.

*Evans.* Remember, William, focative is caret.

*Quick.* And that's a good root.

*Evans.* 'Oman, forbear.

*Mrs. Page.* Peace!

*Evans.* What is your genetive case plural, William?

*Will.* Genetive case!

*Evans.* Ay.

*Will.* Genetive,—horum, harum, horum.

*Quick.* Vengeance of Jenny's case! lie on her! never name her, child, if she be a whore.

*Evans.* For shame, 'oman. . . .

*Evans.* Show me now, William, some declensions of your pronouns.

*Will.* Forsooth, I have forgot.

*Evans.* It is qui, quæ, quod; if you forget your "quies," your "quæ," and your "quods," you must be preeches. Go your ways, and play; go.

*Mrs. P.* He is a better scholar than I thought he was.

*Evans.* He is a good sprag memory. Farewell, Mistress Page.

I cannot but believe that Shakespeare was drawing on his "good sprag memory" when he was writing this. It is jolly fooling, and may quite well be a recollection of his own young days when his mother asked a parson

visitor to put the boy through his paces, and found that he was a better scholar than she thought he was. All the old Grammar School boys in the audiences must have laughed gleefully at this good bit of fun.

In "Henry IV., First Part," from Gadshill, of all unlikely men, we have this:—

"Homo" is a common name to all men,

which comes almost verbally from Lily's "Shorte Introduction of Grammar":—"Homo is a name common to all men." But had this cutpurse gone to a Grammar School?

From a more likely quarter, Sir Toby Belch, "Twelfth Night," Act II., Scene 3, we have "dileculo surgere," part of an adage in Lily's "Latin Grammar."

"Love's Labour's Lost," Act IV., Scene 2: Holofernes, the schoolmaster, lets out:—

Fauste, precor gelida quando pecus omne sub umbra  
Ruminat, and so forth. Ah! Good old Mantuan.

The line is at the opening of the First Eclogue of Mantuanus.

"Titus Andronicus," Act IV., Scene 2:—

*Demetrius.* What's here? A scroll! and written round about?  
Let's see:

*Integer vitæ, scelerisque purus,  
Non eget Mauri jaculis, nec arcu.*

*Chiron.* O! 'tis a verse in Horace; I know it well:  
I read it in the grammar long ago.

So he, too, must have gone to a Grammar School! Strange! Shakespeare forgot where he was, or, rather, remembered where he himself had been!

It would be tedious to dig up all such references and quotations; there are very many. In truth, too much ink has already been shed on the somewhat barren topic of Shakespeare's learning, or want of it. But there is one point to which reference is interesting, namely, his affection for Ovid, who undoubtedly influenced him

greatly. The title page of his first published work, "Venus and Adonis" (1593), bears a quotation from Ovid's "Amores," in the original tongue, and the poem itself, throughout, is distinctly Ovidian in colour. In another early work, "Titus Andronicus," Act IV., Scene 1, Titus asks young Lucius what book it is that Lavinia has picked up. The boy answers:—

Grandsire, 'tis Ovid's Metamorphoses;  
My mother gave it me.

Had Shakespeare's mother given *him* a copy?

I do not think that his schooling affected Shakespeare's mental outlook one way or another. He shows no sign of being in any degree academic; any average schoolboy would have remembered as much as he seems to have done of what his masters stuffed into him. The only abiding result seems to me to have been this keen love of Ovid, whose works certainly helped to mould his style and who remained his faithful friend from beginning to end. Whether Shakespeare could and did read the Latin poet in the original need not be worried about; we *know* that he was intimate with Arthur Golding's translation, published in 1567, his words often finding an echo in Shakespeare's verse.

John Aubrey, in his "Brief Lives," says that Shakespeare "Understood Latine pretty well." Another bit from Aubrey may be quoted here:—

Mr. William Shakespeare was born at Stratford-upon-Avon, in the county of Warwick. His father was a butcher, and I have been told heretofore by some of the neighbours that when he was a boy he exercised his father's trade, but when he killed a calfe he would do it in a high style, and make a speech. . . .

Of the English books that would be put into the boy's hands, the most likely to be an influence would be the Genevan version of the Bible, but there is no call to assert that he was a model of piety because Scriptural phrases are to be found in abundance in his works. In Elizabethan, as in later times, in the writings of every

copious English writer familiarity with the Bible can be clearly traced.

It has been said that Shakespeare did and that he did not know Italian. We don't know. Does it matter?

Of French there is proof that he possessed some knowledge, partly, no doubt, acquired when he was residing in the house of a French family in London.\*

As to the possibility of Shakespeare having written the poems and plays which his friends and rivals tell us he did write, with the very ordinary amount of scholarship of which he was the possessor, there is not any real difficulty or wonder. As Doctor Saintsbury says in "*The Cambridge History of English Literature*" (1910, Vol. V., p. 167): "The difficulty comes from a surprising mixture of ignorance and innocence. A lawyer of moderate intelligence and no extraordinary education will get up, on his brief, at a few days' notice, more knowledge of an extremely technical kind than Shakespeare shows on any one point, and will repeat the process in regard to almost any subject. A journalist of no greater intelligence and education will, at a few hours' or minutes' notice, deceive the very elect in the same way. . . . What is wonderful is not what, in the book sense, Shakespeare knew, but what he did and was." Shakespeare never seems to have bothered to "get up" his subject, for with a little care any intelligent man would avoid the gross anachronisms and other errors perpetrated by him. He did not trouble about them. Need we?

Boys vary immensely in the quality of their minds. in powers of receptivity and of observation. in strength of memory. and so on. Consequently, in the quantity and quality of the knowledge they acquire from schooling, from reading and from personal experience. Judging by his work, Shakespeare must have been a ready recipient of all the knowledge that came his way, a very keen observer of people and incidents that aroused his

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\* See page 105

interest. There is no call for wonderment at the varied knowledge he displays; it is in no way unusual; but the use to which he put it was so. I think that we may be thankful that he lacked organised and academic learning; his brain was left unfettered, free to work in its own way and spontaneously. The faults and the virtues of his work are exactly those to be expected from anyone who was for the most part self-taught and unhampered by a long, conventional school and college training. He was free to be *himself*.

For a shrewd, clever lad Stratford was by no means a deadening environment. His circle of friends and acquaintances was limited; but a plenty of variety in characters, characteristics, and deportments, especially in those rustic types in which he delighted. There must, too, have been many books at the disposal of any boy eager to read; the schoolmaster himself would doubtless be ready to lend to any thirsty scholar; the parsons, attorneys, well-to-do traders and others would be numbered among his father's friends.

There is no reason to assume that Shakespeare grew up a rustic hobbledehoy.

## CHAPTER III

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### YOUTH

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WE do not know at what date Shakespeare left school, and there is no trace as yet discovered as to his youthful doings until we find him a father in the year 1583, at the age of nineteen.

Of home events all that we know of any great interest is: his sister Ann died in 1579, when he was fifteen; his brother Edmund was born in the succeeding year, in the December of which his grandmother Arden died.

There is no direct evidence upon which to base an opinion of what manner of boy and youth Shakespeare was. But the driving life-energy, the *élan vital*, the *libido*, call it what you will, is the same in the boy as it is in the man, though circumstances and influences and training may repress it or drive it to exhibit itself in directions that are not natural to it. Judging by the tone of almost all his work, there is every reason to believe that Shakespeare did follow his bent. The direction in which his life-energy runs *makes* the man become what he does become. Judging by the facts of his life, among which most people omit to include his works, Shakespeare was a well-read man, at any rate as far as contemporary literature was concerned; he was a keen sportsman and intense lover of the country; a poet; a dramatist; and a good man of business. We cannot go far wrong in assuming that as a boy he was fond of books; saw a great deal in country life; had poetic urgings, very likely

stimulated by a fondness for the somewhat luscious Ovid; that he took heed of all that went on in his father's house and business; that he went to the play; that he probably desired to become a player himself, as so many boys do.

During his father's year of office as Bailiff of the town, actors were for the first time entertained by the corporation of Stratford: the year being 1568, when the boy was four years old. Of that visit he can scarcely have had any vivid recollection. When he was nine the player-folk came again, and thereafter during his youth their visits were frequent. It cannot be credited that Shakespeare did not witness some of their performances.

But did Shakespeare remain at home till his marriage?

Aubrey's statement, quoted in the preceding chapter, that the youth followed what was doubtless one of his father's many callings may well have been true. It was quite usual then for a lad on his leaving school to be apprenticed to his father.

The statement of Aubrey is borne out by John Dowdall, who, touring through Warwickshire in 1693, heard gossip in Stratford that Shakespeare had been a butcher's apprentice.

Then there is the internal evidence of the plays, which must, of course, be used very gingerly; it is so easy to find in it proofs of anything we want to prove. I have no commentarial axe to grind.

In the plays there is shown what always has seemed to my mind a peculiar and intimate knowledge, first-hand knowledge, of country-house life and of country-house servants. It is quite possible and in no way improbable that he did go to work as a serving-man in one of the Warwickshire or Gloucestershire country mansions; or as a tutor. Aubrey says that Shakespeare "Had been in his younger yeares a schoolmaster in the country." In those days serving-men were often the sons of yeomen, and were skilled in hawking, hunting, and other field sports, of

which Shakespeare shows such intimate knowledge. To become really accomplished in any of these sports early training and personal experience were essential.

This brings us to the interesting theory, so ably supported by Doctor Madden in "The Diary of Master William Silence," that Shakespeare as a young man spent some time in a remote corner of Gloucestershire. Doctor Madden fully proves his main thesis that Shakespeare "was beyond doubt a sportsman, with rare skill in the mysteries of woodcraft, loving to recall the very names of the hounds with which he was wont to hunt; a practical falconer . . . . and a horseman and horsekeeper, accustomed to speak the homely language of the stable." Those who wish to delve further into this point must go to Doctor Madden's book, quite the most charming contribution yet made to Shakespearean lore and criticism.

It does, indeed, seem that some passages in the plays indicate that Shakespeare had personal knowledge of the Gloucestershire countryside.

In "King Richard II.," Act II., Scene 3, there is this:—

The Wolds in Gloucestershire.

*Enter* Bolingbroke and Northumberland, with forces.

Bolingbroke asks how far it is to Berkeley, but his companion is not acquainted with the neighbourhood and cannot provide the information. Henry Percy comes along, the question is put to him, and he replies:—

There stands the castle by yond tuft of trees.

In 1887. Doctor Madden visited Dursley, in Gloucestershire, and in the course of a very interesting walk met with a groom on Stinchcombe Hill, of whom he asked, "How far is it to Berkeley?" He received the reply, "You can see a tower of the castle. It lays along of the clump of trees." The groom and Percy picked out the same landmark.

And is there not a smack of Cotswold in the hunting scene in Act II., Scene 3, of "Titus Andronicus"?



*Marcus.* I have dogs, my lord,  
Will rouse the proudest panther in the chase,  
*And climb the highest promontory top.*

*Titus.* And I have horses will follow where the game  
Makes way, and run like swallows o'er the plain.

Exactly what would be wanted in the Cotswold around Dursley; the "panther" being a poet's license.

We may here note two minor points. In "The Winter's Tale," Act II., Scene 1, there is this curious phrase:—

I would land-damn him.

Landam and some variants are obsolete Gloucestershire words of abuse.\*

Then in "Hamlet," Act IV., Scene 5, Ophelia says:—

They say the owl was a baker's daughter.

Douce refers to a Gloucestershire country tale: Jesus once applied at a baker's for bread. The housewife set some dough to bake, but was upbraided by her daughter, who took some of it away. What was left grew in size miraculously, and the girl squawked out, "Heugh! Heugh!" a note akin to that of an owl, into which bird Jesus then changed her. Ophelia goes on to say:—

Lord, we know what we are, but know not what we may be.

Doctor Madden's researches and his practical knowledge of various sports have enabled him to deal fully and finally with Shakespeare's skill as a sportsman and the use to which he put his experience. He says that as his work progressed:—"I discerned more and more clearly the true nature of these allusions" (to horsemanship, hunting, hawking, and so on) "how they for the most part well up spontaneously as from the Poet's inmost soul, and are seldom suggested by the plot or character in hand at the moment, with which, indeed, they

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\* See a note in "The Arden Shakespeare."

are often out of keeping." And:—"Shakespeare's allusions to horse, hound, hawk, and deer contrast in mere point of frequency with those of any other writer, in ancient or modern times. Some of these references are in themselves of an ordinary kind, and only acquire significance from their frequent occurrence, and from the circumstance that they are seldom suggested by any necessary action of the drama, but seem to spring forth out of the abundance of the poet's heart. Others are of a different character, and especially characteristic of Shakespeare."

"Venus and Adonis," Shakespeare's first published poem, dealt largely with hunting and is crammed with observations of sport and nature. The memory of the poet was evidently well-supplied with terms and recollections of incidents of the chase.

His knowledge and love of the country are evident again and again throughout the poems and plays, and always ring true; they are not make-believe. More than in any other place this love is shown in the fourth act of "A Winter's Tale," one of his latest works. The note is struck when Autolycus appears singing:—

When daffodils begin to peer,  
With heigh! the doxy over the dale,  
Why, then comes in the sweet o' the year;  
For the red-blood reigns in the winter's pale.

Later on, Florizel says:—

I bless the time  
When my good falcon made her flight across  
Thy father's ground.

And is there not some ring of an Arden memory in the shepherd's upbraiding of Perdita?

Fie, daughter! when my old wife lived, upon  
This day she was both pantler, butler, cook,  
Both dame and servant; welcomed all, served all;  
Would sing her song and dance her turn; now here,  
At upper end o' the table, now i' the middle;  
On his shoulder, and his; her face o' fire

With labour, and the things she took to quench it  
 She would to each one sip. . . . .  
 Come, quench your blushes and present yourself  
 That which you are, mistress o' the feast: come on  
 And bid us welcome to your sheepshearing,  
 As your good flock shall prosper.

I refuse to believe that that is not reminiscent; the poet's memory had to discharge itself. No one whose knowledge of the country was second-hand or even superficial could have written as Shakespeare wrote about country sights, sounds and doings. He revels in rustic scenes and with rustic folk; he never tires of them, and they are never tiresome to us.

One of the few natural touches in "Love's Labour's Lost" is a bit of country; in Act V., Scene 2:—

*Biron.* This fellow picks up wit, as pigeons pease,  
 And utters it again when God doth please.  
 He is wit's pedlar, and retails his wares  
 At wakes, and wassails, meetings, markets, fairs.

All of which Shakespeare himself must have attended in and around Stratford.

In another early play there is this realistic touch; "The Third Part of King Henry VI.," Act I., Scene 4:—

*Clifford* Ay, ay, so strives the woodcock with the gin.  
*Northumberland.* So doth the cony struggle in the net.

In "The Merchant of Venice," Act II., Scene 9, Arragon surprises with a simile from British bird life:—

like the martlet,  
 Builds in the weather on the outward wall.

The martlet being the house martin, and weather here signifying exposure to the elements.

One point is worth bearing in mind. Shakespeare's knowledge of country things was doubtless added to during his life in London, from any part of which city it was an easy half-hour's walk out into the fields and woods, and during the many provincial tours taken by the company of actors to which he was attached.

## CHAPTER IV

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### THE ELIZABETHAN ATMOSPHERE

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IN addition to the home influences of his youth, there were those common to all born in those bustling days, when it must have seemed to many almost as if they had been born to assist at the birth of a new world. The general atmosphere of his surroundings, what he heard, read, saw of old times and of these new ones, must forcefully have impressed the mind of any keen, inquisitive young man. "Each generation," says Maudsley in "The Physiology of Mind," "has a common heritage of ideas, and an individual mind finds itself in a certain atmosphere of thought which it reflects more or less distinctly. He who has what is called genius is in harmony with and assimilates the best thought of his own epoch, and of preceding epochs, and carries it forward to a higher evolution." All this is true of Shakespeare. But he was not so much a thinker as an expresser of the thoughts of other men; he was a trumpet through which sounded the thoughts of the world in which he moved. He would have been unhuman, instead of intensely human, if he had not absorbed much of the revolution that throughout his whole life was taking place in the minds of men, especially of many of the finer literary spirits with which he must have come into close touch. And Professor Stanley • Hall says: "Genius only edits the inspiration of the crowd."

Galton says this:—"The child is passionately attached to his home, and then to his school, his country, and religion. . . . The every-day utterances, the likes and dislikes of his parents, their social and caste feelings, their religious persuasions are absorbed by him; their views, and those of his teachers, become assimilated and made his own." And, if he be a writer, he will pour them out re-formed and re-modelled, in accord with the driving power of his own life-energy. Whether or not Shakespeare was passionately attached to his home we do not know, or to his school; but there is not any getting away from the fact that he was influenced by the prosperous commercial, bourgeois, conventional thought that was the atmosphere of his home and general surroundings. To his religious beliefs, if he had any, we have no clue; but we know that he must have been a churchgoer, for the law made all men such. I think there are clear indications that he had a sympathetic insight into the Roman Catholic temperament, for many of his portraits of priests and higher clerics show an understanding that could come only from sympathy. As to caste feeling, I fear he was inclined to snobbishness, fond of the well-born and the well-to-do, and instinctively hostile to the workers when they dared to demand any share in the conduct of their affairs.

We have seen that the shadow of death often passed over his home, and, being sensitive to emotions as are all men of literary genius, he must have early learned that there are tears as well as laughter in every-day life. "It is experience that makes men thoughtful."

We who have seen the worst calamity that the world has ever endured can realise how greatly at times the tone of mind of a nation can change fundamentally. It is one of the abilities of genius to absorb and express the emotion of his age. "One of the most notable changes that can come over a nation," says Galton, in "Inquiries into Human Faculty," "is from a state corresponding to that of our past dark ages into one like that of the Renaissance. In the first case, the minds of men are wholly taken up

with routine work, and in copying what their predecessors have done; they degrade into servile imitators and submissive slaves to the past. In the second case, some circumstance or idea has finally discredited the authorities that impeded intellectual growth, and has unexpectedly revealed new possibilities. Then the mind of a nation is set free."

This happened in the age of Elizabeth, and we are considering the effect it must have had upon the sensitive mind of an emotional poet. It was a time of fermentation; but the new wine of life was not poured into old bottles. Writers dared to be themselves. Men of every profession and calling dared to tread new paths, many of which had heretofore been marked, "Trespassers will be *persecuted*." The thought of the nation was set free. Intellectual growth was no longer stunted. New possibilities were being revealed on every side. The world of thought and of matter seemed to have suddenly grown larger. Writers no longer slavishly followed in the tracks of those who had gone before, but, shaking themselves free from the shackles of the past, set forth upon voyages of discovery. The race did not change, but it found itself in a new mental environment; men breathed deeply as do those who are released from prison, and some of them ran riot.

All of this must have had a deep influence upon Shakespeare. He sang the patriotic jingoism that was rife around him and blared out the pride of being an Englishman. He glorified kings and queens, priests and soldiers—all in a thoroughly conventional fashion. But, being great, he was also himself, and showed us the fundamental emotions of men and women and painted inimitably the every-day life of town and country.

In the Introduction to "The Life of King Henry the Fifth," in "The Arden Shakespeare," Mr. Herbert Arthur Evans has something worth quoting here:—

"The emergence of the historical drama during the last decade of Elizabeth's reign, and the popularity which it achieved during its brief existence, were the natural outcome of the consciousness

of national unity and national greatness to which England was then awakening. Haunted for more than a quarter of a century by the constant dread of foreign invasion and domestic treachery, the country could at last breathe freely, and the fervid patriotism that now animated every order of the state found appropriate expression in 'a noble and solid curiosity' to learn the story of the nation's past. Of this curiosity the theatres then as always the reflection of the popular taste, were not slow to take advantage."

As a dramatist, Shakespeare showed extraordinary capacity to judge the popular feelings and desires, but he could not have possessed this power, this intuition, had he not, at any rate to some extent, been in accord with those feelings and desires. Did we not know anything of it from other sources, we could gauge the public mind of the Elizabethan crowd from a study of Shakespeare's plays. Doubtless he is for all time, but he is also, through and through, typical of his own time.

All genius is imitative and impressionable in a high degree. Shakespeare was not an exception; he never struck out a new line for himself; he only did better what his competitors were engaged in doing. The mind of a writer of genius is a musical instrument, played on by every kind of influence, external and internal, objective and subjective, some of the latter, most indeed, being inherited, as is the instrument itself. You cannot play violin music upon a trumpet. Shelley could not have written what Shakespeare wrote; the instruments were different, so were the times in which they lived.

## CHAPTER V

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### HIS WIFE

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MORE nonsense has been written about Shakespeare's marriage than about any other event in his life; that is saying much. Why should we endeavour to solve problems for the solution of which we have not the necessary data? To what purpose all the surmising about Shakespeare's relations with his wife? We are reasonably sure as to whom he married, but there is not any reason to think that the marriage was not happy. Why go hunting after mares' nests? The eggs in them are generally addled. In any other line of research those who deliberately indulged in myth-manufacture would be counted as lunatics.

The fact that Shakespeare was married is known to us from the inscription on his widow's tombstone, and from two entries in the Stratford-on-Avon registers:—

1583. May 26, Susanna daughter to William Shakspere.

1584, February. Hamnet and Judith sonne and daughter to William Shakspere.

That these were the children of *our* Will is proved by *his* will, if I may indulge in a Shakespearean quip.

There are various clues as to whom he married, and when.

In the Bishop's Registry at Worcester there is a deed, whereby Fulk Sandells and John Rychardeon, farm



labourers of Stratford in the County of Warwick, bind themselves on November 28th, 1582, in the sum of £40, to take upon themselves any liability which might fall upon the Bishop in case the marriage between William Shakspeare and Anne Hathwey of Stratford, maiden, should from any cause prove to be invalid; they "to be married together with once asking of the bannes of matrimony." Where the "bannes" were to be called, or the marriage to be solemnised, is not indicated. Also, "the said Willm do not proceed to solemnization of maridg with the said Anne Hathwey without the consent of hir frindes," which may simply mean that the two guarantors had come without any proof that Anne's friends did desire the marriage. It should be noted that £40 was then a large sum, equivalent to at least £200 of our money (before the war).

Shakespeare was an infant at law, not yet being more than nineteen years of age, and according to Anne's tombstone she was eight years his elder. Rowe says that she was the daughter of one Hathaway, reputed to have been a well-to-do yeoman in the neighbourhood of Stratford. In September, 1581, Richard Hathaway of Shottery, a hamlet in the parish of Stratford, was buried. Among those mentioned in his will was Agnes, the eldest daughter; Agnes and Anne being then variants of the same name. Further, to quote Sir Sidney Lee, Thomas Whittington, a shepherd in the employment of this Shottery-Hathaway, in his will, bearing the date 1602, mentions Mrs. Anne Shakespeare in conjunction with the mother of Anne Hathaway and two of her brothers. This would seem to set all doubt at rest as to the identity of Mrs. William Shakespeare. It seems to me to be far-fetched to argue that the identity of her husband and the poet has not been definitely proved. It does not matter very much *who* she was; that we do not know *what* she was is a loss.

It is not known when the marriage took place, but presumably it was quite soon after the bond was executed

at Worcester; nor do we know where it was solemnised. Not in Stratford parish, apparently, as there is no entry to that effect in the register.

It should be noted as a curious coincidence that on the day previous to the Hathaway bond, a licence was granted to Wm. Shaxpere to marry Anna Whateley de Temple Grafton. But, as Lee points out, there were many William Shakespeares then in the diocese of Worcester. Who Anna Whateley was we do not know, and unfortunately the Parish Registers of Temple Grafton for that period have vanished. It may be noted that folk in the humble position of our William and Anne would scarcely have applied for a licence.

I cannot follow those who confidently state as a fact that Sandells and Rychardson acted as they did in order to make sure that Shakespeare would do the "right thing" by Anne Hathaway; it is just as likely that the action was taken at his instigation. But there is an irregularity in the bond which gives some colour to the surmise that the marriage did not meet with his parents' approval. It was usual in such bonds for either the would-be bridegroom or his father to be one of the sureties; Shakespeare could not have been accepted as such, being an infant, and it is quite possible that at this date his father would not have been able to produce the necessary security.

It may be fairly concluded that Shakespeare was married in December, 1582. Within six months his elder daughter was born; so it is possible that his wife's relations and he himself had realised that there was good reason for hurrying on the marriage. It is sheer waste of time to enter into the arguments that have been advanced in order to clear Shakespeare of having been intimate with his wife before he should have been. He was not a saint, but a man, and not the first youth to have yielded to the charms of a woman older than himself.

We are without any detailed information as to the terms upon which Shakespeare and his wife lived, but

there is no reason whatever to surmise that they did not get along very well. He probably lived with her in Stratford until after the birth of the twins, Hamnet and Judith, in 1584. These two were named after Hamnet (or Hamlet) Sadler and his wife Judith, prosperous trading folk of Stratford, who would scarcely have liked their names to have been given to the children of a scandalous marriage or one which had been bitterly opposed by the family of the bridegroom.

When Shakespeare left Stratford, he may have taken his wife with him, or she may have followed him later, or she may have always remained in charge of affairs at home; we do not know. We do know that he always looked upon Stratford as his home. His ambition evidently was to earn sufficient means to establish himself and his wife and his children in a good position in his native town, and to leave a proper endowment for those who would succeed him.

If we go to the poems and the plays for evidence as to Shakespeare's views upon matrimony, we can prove—to our own satisfaction—any theory we choose to set up, and knock down anyone else's. That way futility, not fertility, lies.

I have recently been re-reading the Sonnets,\* and it strongly forced itself upon me that, quite probably, or at least possibly, some of them were addressed to his wife. I was not looking for this; it just came on me as I was wondering why some of these poems had been written, and to whom they were addressed, if to anyone. There is no evidence that his wife was an illiterate woman, or that she was not in fullest sympathy with his work. We do not know at what date the sonnets were composed; some of them may have been written before he left Stratford for London, and many appear to me to be quite youthful and ingenuous. Shakespeare may have delighted to please and to compliment his wife and the mother of his children.

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\* For criticism of the Sonnets in general see page 83

Why not? It is not unknown for poets to love their wives and to write poems to them.

The following are some of the Sonnets which I think may have been addressed to Mrs. Shakespeare:—No. XXV., in which he says that he finds unlooked-for “joy in that I honour most,” concluding with:—

Then happy I, that love and am beloved,  
Where I may not remove, nor be removed.

Nos. XXVII. and XXVIII. can be most easily understood if they were written to his absent wife; written by him in town and sent to her in their country home:—

#### XXVII.

Weary with toil, I haste me to my bed,  
The dear repose for limbs with travel tired;  
But then begins a journey in my head,  
To work my mind, when body's work's expired:  
For then my thoughts (from far where I abide)  
Intend a zealous pilgrimage to thee,  
And keep my drooping eyelids open wide,  
Looking on darkness which the blind do see:  
Save that my soul's imaginary sight  
Presents thy shadow to my sightless view,  
Which, like a jewel hung in ghastly night,  
Makes black night beauteous, and her old face new.  
Lo, thus, by day my limbs, by night my mind,  
For thee, and for myself, no quiet find.

#### XXVIII.

How can I then return in happy plight,  
That am debarred the benefit of rest?  
When day's oppression is not eased by night,  
But day by night and night by day oppress'd?  
And each, though enemies to either's reign,  
Do in consent shake hands to torture me,  
The one by toil, the other to complain  
How far I toil, still further off from thee.  
I tell the day, to please him, thou art bright,  
And dost him grace when clouds do blot the heaven:

So flatter I the swart-complexion'd night;  
When sparkling stars twire not, thou gild'st the even.  
But day doth daily draw my sorrows longer,  
And night doth nightly make grief's length seem stronger.

Allowing for poetical hyperbole, that is just the kind of thing an emotional poet would write to an absent wife of whom he was dearly fond.

I will not press this conjecture about the Sonnets, or, rather, about some of them; it is sheer conjecture and without any proof. But, at the same time, it seems more likely to be correct than the assumption that Shakespeare did not love his wife, and was badly faithless to her, careering after dark ladies of whose identity the myth-mongers are so sure. Shakespeare's wife may have been beautiful and dark and tantalising for all we know to the contrary.

Why should he not have written Sonnets L. and LL. while on his return from a visit to his wife in their Stratford home? They will bear this interpretation as plausibly as any other:—

L.

How heavy do I journey on the way,  
When what I seek—my weary travel's end—  
Doth teach that ease and that repose to say,  
'Thus far the miles are measured from thy friend!'  
The beast that bears me, tired with my woe,  
Plods dully on, to bear that weight in me,  
As if by some instinct the wretch did know  
His rider loved not speed, being made from thee:  
The bloody spur cannot provoke him on  
That sometimes anger thrusts into his hide,  
Which heavily he answers with a groan,  
More sharp to me than spurring to his side;  
For that same groan doth put this in my mind,  
My grief lies onward, and my joy behind.

## LI.

Thus can my love excuse the slow offence  
 Of my dull bearer, when from thee I speed :  
 From where thou art why should I haste me thence?  
 Till I return, of posting is no need.  
 Oh, what excuse will my poor beast then find,  
 When swift extremity can seem but slow?  
 Then should I spur, though mounted on the wind ;  
 In winged speed no motion should I know :  
 Then can no horse with my desire keep pace ;  
 Therefore desire, of perfect love being made,  
 Shall neigh (no dull flesh) in his fiery race ;  
 But love, for love, thus shall excuse my jade ;  
     Since from thee going he went wilful slow,  
     Towards thee I'll run, and give him leave to go.

If it be urged that with so full a love he should have kept her by his side in London, well, there may have been many quite good reasons for her remaining chiefly resident in Stratford; for example, to look after his and her children there, where it would be more healthy than in the city.

Consider now this one :—

## LXXI.

No longer mourn for me, when I am dead,  
 Than you shall hear the surly sullen bell  
 Give warning to the world that I am fled  
 From this vile world, with vilest worms to dwell :  
 Nay, if you read this line, remember not  
 The hand that writ it ; for I love you so,  
 That I in your sweet thoughts would be forgot,  
 If thinking on me then should make you woe.  
 Oh if (I say) you look upon this verse,  
 When I perhaps compounded am with clay,  
 Do not so much as my poor name rehearse ;  
 But let your love even with my life decay :  
     Lest the wise world should look into your moan,  
     And mock you with me after I am gone.

Sonnets XCI. to No. CV. may also have been addressed to his wife; I quite realise that they may not have been. Also, Nos. CIX. to CXX. This last may refer to some passing quarrel:—

## CXX.

That you were once unkind, befriends me now,  
And for that sorrow, which I then did feel,  
Needs must I under my transgression bow,  
Unless my nerves were brass or hammer'd steel.

For if you were by my unkindness shaken,  
As I by yours, you've pass'd a hell of time:  
And I, a tyrant, have no leisure taken  
To weigh how once I suffer'd in your crime.  
Oh that our night of woe might have remembered  
My deepest sense, how hard true sorrow hits,  
And soon to you, as you to me, then tender'd  
The humble salve which wounded bosoms fits!

But that your trespass now becomes a fee;  
Mine ransoms yours, and yours must ransom me.

To receive that would almost make a wise wife resolve to have another tiff with her man, in the hope of provoking him to more such.

May not the two following have been quite youthful efforts in that punning style to which he was so much addicted in his early work, and from which he never quite freed himself? Doctor Dowden and Oxford are responsible for the italics:—

## CXXXV.

Whoever hath her wish, thou hast thy *Will*  
And *Will* to boot, and *Will* in over-plus;  
More than enough am I that vex thee still,  
To thy sweet will making addition thus.  
Wilt thou, whose will is large and spacious,  
Not once vouchsafe to hide my will in thine?  
Shall will in others seem right gracious,  
And in my will no fair acceptance shine?  
The sea, all water, yet receives rain still,  
And in abundance addeth to his store;

So then, being rich in *Will*, add to thy *Will*  
 One will of mine, to make thy large *Will* more.  
 Let no unkind, no fair beseechers kill;  
 Think all but one, and me in that one *Will*.

## CXXXVI.

If thy soul check thee that I come so near,  
 Swear to thy blind soul that I was thy *Will*,  
 And will, thy soul knows, is admitted there;  
 Thus far from love, my love-suit, sweet, fulfil.  
*Will* will fulfil the treasure of thy love,  
 Ay, fill it full with wills, and my will one,  
 In things of great receipt with ease we prove;  
 Among a number, one is reckoned none.  
 Then in the number let me pass untold,  
 Though in thy stores' account I one must be;  
 For nothing hold me, so it please thee hold  
 That nothing me, a something sweet to thee:  
 Make but my name thy love, and love that still,  
 And then thou lov'st me—for my name is *Will*.

Youthful poets can write this sort of stuff to their lady-loves, and surely Shakespeare could have achieved these even in the days of his courtship. There is no evidence to show that he had not experimented in verse before he went to town, and it would have been exceptional if a poet so fluent, as he later showed himself, had not early stretched his wings.



## CHAPTER VI

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### THE LUCY EPISODE

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WHY did Shakespeare go to London, and when? We do not know. As to the *why*. It may reasonably be supposed that, as was the way so often with ambitious, brainy young men, he desired a wider outlet for his energies and abilities than was provided by a country town; he would want to see something of the wide world, and he would like to make his fortune. Also, his father's business affairs were not flourishing, which may have made the son wish for fresh fields for his enterprise. Also, London was then the literary capital of England. Of the metropolis he would have heard much, not only in a general way but in a particular, from townsfolk who had gone thither.

Then there is the story that he was driven out from Stratford by persecution from a local magnate, consequent on a poaching affair in which he was mixed up.

Nicholas Rowe, in his biography of Shakespeare, 1709, gives the following, which may be wholly or partially true, or entirely fallacious:—

“He had, by a misfortune common enough to young fellows, fallen into ill-company; and amongst them, some, that made a frequent practise of deer-stealing, engaged him with them more than once in robbing a park that belonged to Sir Thomas Lucy of Charlcote near Stratford. For this he was prosecuted by that gentleman, as he

thought, somewhat too severely; and, in order to revenge that ill-usage, he made a ballad upon him, and though this, probably the first essay of his poetry, be lost, yet it is said to have been so very bitter that it redoubled the prosecution against him to that degree that he was obliged to leave his business and family in Warwickshire for some time and shelter himself in London."

To which may be added this, supplied some time before 1708, by the Reverend Richard Davies, vicar of Sapperton in Gloucestershire, who says that Shakespeare was "much given to all unluckiness in stealing venison and rabbits, particularly from Sir Thomas Lucy, who had him oft whipt, and sometimes imprisoned, and at last made him fly his native county to his great advancement."

We can believe this story, or not, as we see fit; but I cannot see any reason for discrediting it, though some of the details may be fanciful. This, too, should be borne in mind: that around a famous man's memory only those myths will grow up which are *likely* to be true, and the character of which is in keeping with his general repute among those who knew him, or had heard about him from his contemporaries.

In any case, in those days deer-stealing was not looked on as a very heinous offence, except by the owners of the deer. Quite reputable folk indulged in this illicit sport; witness a passage that Doctor Madden quotes from Fosbroke's "History of Gloucestershire":—

"Some of the principal persons in this county (whose name I suppress when the family is still in existence) were not ashamed of the practice of deer-stealing. Henry Parmiter of Stone, an Attorney-at-Lawe; Giles . . . then of Stone, Attorney-at-Lawe; Giles . . . then of . . . ; George Smallwood, then of Dursley, and seven others, all men of metall and good woodmen (I mean old notorious deer-stealers) came in the night time to Michaelwood with deer-nets and dogs to steele deer."

So why not Shakespeare, and not in too disreputable company?

This reputed strife with Lucy has led to the theory, now almost accepted as a fact, that Shakespeare took revenge on his old enemy by caricaturing him as Justice Shallow. Long ago I doubted if this were so, and later was delighted to find that Doctor Madden wholly demolished the conjecture. This identification would never have been thought of if it had not been that Slender, in "The Merry Wives of Windsor" (Act I., Scene 1), refers to Shallow's coat of arms as bearing a "dozen white luses." A few lines later Sir Hugh Evans perverts this into:—

The dozen white louses do become an old coat well; it agrees well, *passant*; it is a familiar beast to man, and signifies love.

To which Shallow replies, in correction:—

The luce is the fresh fish.

The luce was the pike, and therefore much has been made of Falstaff's saying anent Shallow ("The Second Part of King Henry the Fourth," Act III., Scene 2):—

If the young dace be a bait for the old pike,

I see no reason in the law of nature but I may snap at him.

But surely it is to himself that Falstaff applies the term "old pike"? It is the old freebooter who will snap at the tempting bait.

Returning to the opening of "The Merry Wives," Slender says that Robert Shallow is a Justice of the Peace in the County of Gloucester, and the Shallow scenes in "Henry IV." are laid in that county; of that there is "no possible doubt whatever."

The first Scene of Act V. of "The Second Part of King Henry the Fourth" is laid in a room in Shallow's Gloucestershire home, and we find therein:—

*Davy.* I beseech you, sir, to countenance William Visor of Wincot against Clement Perkes of the hill.

*Shallow.* There be many complaints, Davy, against that Visor: that Visor is an arrant knave, on my knowledge.

Could this have been written by one who was *not* familiar with the country around Dursley? It is just possible that Shakespeare had relations resident in Dursley; and a pathway through the woods there was long known as "Shakespeare's walk." A family of Shakespeares resided there, and, more curious still, in the parish register of Beverton, near by, appears the name of Hathaway. Woodmancote, in the same district, is commonly pronounced Woncot, or Womcot; it is situated at the foot of Stinchcombe Hill, known locally as "The Hill," whereon is the site of a house that once belonged to a family named Purchase, or Perkis; and a family named Vizard, or Visor, was connected with Woodmancote. Hence—can we doubt it?—arose William Visor of Wincot *versus* Clement Perkes of the hill.

Whatever we may think of the *lucres* in "The Merry Wives," can there be any doubt that Robert Shallow came from Gloucestershire and not from Warwickshire? In "Henry IV." Shakespeare drew his portrait at full length, going into altogether undramatic details concerning his early life in town, the "mad days" that he had spent there, the time that he lay "all night in the windmill in Saint George's field" with Sir John; and so on. What could all this, and more such, have to do with Sir Thomas Lucy? The Lucy family was of high standing and repute, and Sir Thomas a distinguished man. Would Shakespeare, or any player or playwright, have dared to take liberties with such a man? I think not. Caricaturing the powerful was not then a pastime to be pursued recklessly. An important point, also, is this: that Shakespeare was ambitious to become a local magnate himself. Is it, then, likely that he would go out of his way to insult and offend a worthy and influential Stratford neighbour? No.

## CHAPTER VII

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### IN LONDON

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IN 1587, Shakespeare's name appears as a party with his father in an effort to come to some arrangement with Lambert in regard to his mother's mortgaged property at Ashbies; but we cannot take this as proof that he was in Stratford at that time. So, presuming that he was at home when his twin children were born, in February, 1584-85, no evidence has been found of his whereabouts and doings until we learn that he was a well-known writer and actor in London in 1592.

In September of that year, Robert Greene, a dramatist and general writer, died, having been busy during his last days in preparing a curious work which he called "Greene's Groatworth of Witte: Bought with a Million of Repentance." In this quaint production he warns some of his literary friends against "an upstart crow, beautified with our feathers, that with his *Tygers heart wrapt in a Players hide*, supposes he is well able to bumbast out a blanke verse as the best of you; and being an absolute *Johannes Factotum*, is in his owne conceit the only Shake-scene in a countrie."

Some months later Henry Chettle published a pamphlet, called "Kind-Harts Dreame," in which he makes due apology for having, as literary executor to Greene, allowed a scandalous attack on various writers to appear. The following passage is generally accepted as having reference to Shakespeare:—"Myselfe have seene

his demeanour no lesse civill, than he exelent in the qualitie he professes;—besides, divers of worship have reported his uprightness of dealing, which argues his honesty, and his facetious grace in writing, that approves his art."

There is no actual proof that either of these two excerpts referred to Shakespeare, but the presumption is very strong that they did.

We are on undoubtedly firm ground, however, with this entry at Stationers' Hall:—

1593, Xvii<sup>o</sup> Aprilis. Richard Field. Entred for his copie. . . . a book intuled Venus and Adonis.

Assigned over to Mr. Harrison sen: 25 Junij. 1594.

That is to say, Richard Field printed and, later, Harrison sold a poem entitled "Venus and Adonis," which is known to be written by Shakespeare, because he claims it as his work by appending his full name to the dedication.

So we have our man in London, with at any rate one highly-placed friend, and with a considerable reputation as an actor and writer of plays; he was nearly thirty years of age; married and with three children.

But at what date he went to London and of the events of his early years there we have no record. We do know very fully, however, what was the atmosphere in which he found himself when probably not much over the age of twenty-one.

It is useless speculating as to what route he followed when he first went to town, for we do not know whence he started. Not knowing his means, we cannot say how he travelled, whether afoot or astride a horse.

It may fairly be surmised that he did not find himself friendless when first he reached London, for there were a good few Stratfordians there; and, of course, he may have paid casual earlier visits to the town, for there was quite a lot of going and coming between the country town and the metropolis.

Sir Sidney Lee gives some interesting information anent Stratfordians with whom Shakespeare may—it is no more than *may*—have got into touch when he turned up in town. Of these, the most helpful would have been Richard Field, at whose printing works Shakespeare's first published poem was put to press. The printer was baptised in November, 1561, and was therefore about two and a-half years older than the poet. He was the son of Henry Field, a thriving tanner, a neighbour and doubtless a friend of John Shakespeare. In September, 1579, Richard was apprenticed to George Bishop, a well-known London printer. It is most likely that Richard and Will were friends in boyhood days; at least, they must have known of one another. Lee tells us that Field soon transferred his services from Bishop to a Frenchman, Thomas Vautrollier, a Huguenot refugee, whose widow he married in due course. Field at first worked in a shop in Blackfriars, close by Ludgate, and afterward at the sign of The Splayed Eagle, in the parish of Saint Michael, Wood Street. He died in 1623, surviving his famous friend.

What was Shakespeare's first employment in town? We do not know, but, as Sir Sidney Lee puts it, "Tradition and commonsense alike point to the stage as an early scene of Shakespeare's occupation in London."

To what kind of a city and what kind of stageland was he introduced? Into what kind of company would he fall? In short, what would be the influences brought to bear upon him?

In size, London was then what we should now look on as a fairly large provincial town, of somewhere about 150,000 inhabitants. To the eyes of one from the country, visiting it for the first time, it must have presented a magnificent appearance, this city of palaces and spires. We have no right to conclude that Shakespeare came to town a raw, uncultured rustic. Rather, he was a keen-eyed, keen-witted, not unlearned young man, probably in countryfied garb and with a broad twang of Warwickshire



in his speech. He would not be a ready gull, but would soon know his way about; his business experience would stand him in good stead, helped out with his shrewd wit. We know that this is the kind of young man that he must have been from our knowledge of what he became.

He would be eager to see the sights of which he would have heard much. He would want to see the river and the world-famous London Bridge. It was the Silver Thames then, of which parson Harrison says:—"I could intreat of the infinit number of swans to be seene upon this river, the two thousand wherries and small boats, whereby three thousand poor watermen are maintained, through the carriage and recarriage of such persons as passe or repasse from time to time upon the same: beside those huge tide-boats, tiltbotes, and barges, which either carry passengers, or bring necessarie provision from all quarters. . . ." He would want to see the splendid palaces of the Queen and of her nobles; the well-stored shops in Cheapside; The Tower, which was so often to be the background for scenes in his plays; the Temple, Westminster Abbey, Saint Paul's. There was much to be seen. The throngs in the streets would strike the countryman with astonishment: the merchants chafering, the apprentices shouting, courtiers in gay apparel, the city dames bedizened; the noise, the striving, the jostling. The dirt and the squalor would not be new to him.

However great may have been his expectations, the impression made upon his mind must at first have been stunning. He must have felt that at last he was in real contact with life and have looked back upon the country towns with which he had been familiar as mere candle-lights compared with the sun.

But it would not so much have been the contact with strange things as the mingling with fresh minds that would stimulate his brain to feverish activity.

With the help of Field and other friends and acquaintances, he would soon be put into the way of seeing in its fullest sense the life of the city.



I cannot credit the legend that Shakespeare's first employment in London was to take care of the gentlemen's horses while they were seated within the playhouse. But he may have been employed in Burbage's stables.

When he arrived in town there were two theatres, both outside the city bounds, beyond Bishopsgate, namely, "The Theatre" and "The Curtain," the former being owned by James Burbage, to whom Shakespeare's knowledge of horses may have recommended him. Probably he soon got some sort of employment in The Theatre. Rowe, indeed, states that "He was received into the company then in being at first in a very mean rank." Malone hands on a tale "that his first office in a theatre was that of prompter's assistant," that is to say, call-boy. It does not very much matter how he got into the theatrical world; what does matter is that he did so, and seems to have made rapid progress.

## CHAPTER VIII

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### PLAYACTING

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IN an illuminating article in "Harper's Magazine," March, 1910, Professor Wallace admirably sums up the situation as regards our knowledge of Shakespeare:—

"The mystery that surrounds the personality of Shakespeare is, after all, made up largely of our own ignorance, much of which is inherited from dead books of large pretensions, but most of which is the result of our own perverse inclination to sit and fiddle in the dark rather than walk in the sun. The truth is, we have more documentary evidence about Shakespeare than about any other dramatist of his time."

But it is not only documentary evidence as to the events of his life that we possess; we have also a full knowledge of the environment in which he worked, and from his writings we can gather further evidence as to the influences which acted upon him. It is the *self*, the mind, of Shakespeare that is worth studying, and the events of his career are only worth this to us, that they help us to know Shakespeare's self.

Though the theatre in, say, 1586, was still the Cinderella of the arts in this country, the status of the actor was not one to be despised. He was no longer a vagabondish man, and was brought into contact, more or less personal, not only with the high-born, but also with those eminent in the world of letters.

In 1571, by Act of Parliament, companies of players were compelled, in order to be free to practice their art, to secure the patronage of a peer, or "other honourable personage of greater degree." This patronage does not seem to have been difficult to procure; it cost the patron nothing. In Shakespeare's later days, the company in which he had become a shareholder, for which he wrote and with which he acted, was numbered among the King's servants and was in frequent attendance at the Court.\*

In 1576, James Burbage built The Theatre, the first regular playhouse in England. The players there, and later at the Globe, were always under the patronage of men of influence, notably, Lord Hunsdon, who held the office of Lord Chamberlain. James's son, Richard Burbage, was the most famous of the actors connected with the company, and must have been one of Shakespeare's closest friends. It was probably to this company that Shakespeare first attached himself; he remained with it until his retirement from the stage. By these players the great majority of his plays were produced.

Of constant and true friends among his fellow-players Shakespeare had many in addition to Dick Burbage; among them John Heminge and Henry Condell, to whom we owe the first collected edition of Shakespeare's plays. Burbage was probably a Londoner, and became the foremost actor of the day. He "created" many of the leading parts in Shakespeare's plays, among them Othello, Hamlet, and Lear. One of the few anecdotes recorded of Shakespeare during his life connects these two players in an amorous adventure. Burbage, so the story goes, during a performance of "Richard III.," made an assignation with a fair lady in the audience, which fact came to Shakespeare's ears. When Burbage went to

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\* For full details concerning the theatrical companies of the day see Sir Sidney Lee, "A Life of William Shakespeare," where the subject is treated with fullness and accuracy.

keep his appointment, he found that he had been forestalled by his comrade, who added insult to injury by informing him that "William the Conqueror was before Richard the Third."

Many of the player-folk were men of substance and held in high esteem, a noteworthy example being Edward Alleyn, who died in 1626, having made a large fortune from theatrical and other speculations, much of which went to the building and endowment of Dulwich College. Many of the players were well-travelled men, touring throughout England, going to Scotland, where one of their visits stirred up no little commotion, and visiting the Continent: Germany, Denmark, Holland, France, Austria, etc. Shakespeare must have accompanied his company on many occasions when they visited the provinces, but there does not appear to be any trustworthy evidence that he ever went overseas. There certainly is none such in the plays; he was interested in "who did what," not bothering himself much about the "when and where." He does not take us to Venice, or Verona, or Rome, or Paris, or Troy; his characters always have London at their backs, and London ways and manners for their environment.

It was into a world of wonders that this countryman entered. Impressions of the most varied character must have poured into his eager, receptive, retentive mind; material to be used in many a scene of his plays and in the drawing of many of his characters lay around him in profusion. Again and again he shows how observant he was of the characteristics of Londoners, and his knowledge of the town must have been as intimate and peculiar as was that of Fielding, Dickens and Thackeray.

He was an actor, and knew the ways of the players through and through, making frequent reference to them in the plays. Aubrey obtained some of his information regarding Shakespeare from an old actor, William Beeston, who died in 1682, and who was the son of Christopher Beeston, a fellow-player with Shakespeare for many a

year. Aubrey states that Shakespeare was "inclined naturally to poetry and acting," which means, I suppose, that he was a born actor; also that "he did act exceedingly well (now B. Johnson was never a good actor, but an excellent instructor)."\* His comrades, Heminge and Condell, speak of him as "so worthy a friend and fellow." Chettle says he was "excellent in the qualities he possessed," thereby meaning as an actor. He played a part in Ben Jonson's "Every Man in His Humour," and in the same writer's tragedy, "Sejanus." John Davis says, vaguely, that he "played some kingly parts in sport." Gilbert Shakespeare is said to have been a frequent visitor to his famous brother in town, and in his late days spoke of him as acting in "As You Like It," wearing a long beard; the part, perhaps, being that of Adam. Rowe says that he played the ghost in "Hamlet," and that this was his most successful performance. It takes a fine actor to prevent the said ghost from being a terrible bore.

Even if there were not any direct evidence that Shakespeare was an actor, we should come to the conclusion that he was so from internal evidence in the plays, or, if not an actor, at least very familiar with stage doings.

The use of stage terms is frequent. A few examples must here suffice:—

In Act III., Scene 5 of "King Richard III.," we have this from Buckingham, into whose mouth a poet who was not also a player would scarcely have thought of putting such talk:—

Tut! I can counterfeit the deep tragedian,  
 Speak and look back, and pry on every side,  
 Tremble and start at wagging of a straw,  
 Intending deep suspicion: ghastly looks  
 Are at my service, like enforced smiles.

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\* The Elizabethans and Jacobean spelled this dramatist's name indifferently "Johnson" and "Jonson."

Is this a gibe at some poor performers in the company?

Then there is this, which does not come naturally from either of the merry wives concerned: in Act III., Scene 3, of "The Merry Wives of Windsor":—

*Mrs. Ford.* Mistress Page, remember your cue.

*Mrs. Page.* I warrant thee; if I do not act it, hiss me.

This is distinctly stage chatter.

In "King Richard II.," Act V., Scene 2, these well-known lines are given to the Duke of York, who would not likely have thought of such a simile, especially in an age when there were no theatres:—

As in a theatre, the eyes of men,  
After a well-grac'd actor leaves the stage  
Are idly bent on him that enters next,  
Thinking his prattle to be tedious. . . .

It is more often to the actor who is not "well-grac'd" that Shakespeare refers: maybe his plays had suffered at their hands and voices. There is the wise and experienced advice to the players in "Hamlet" (Act III., Scene 2). The voice is that of the young prince of Denmark, but the thought is that of the actor-dramatist. It is so well-known that I forbear to quote it.

Shakespeare does not seem to have been wholly content with the calling which brought to him his bread, butter *and* jam; a dislike for the "profession" which was shared by Macready, throughout whose "Diaries" there runs a sub-current of regret at his having to demean himself by being an actor. If I remember rightly, Charles Mayne Young was somewhat similarly disposed.

Several of the Sonnets touch on acting: more particularly these two:—

#### CX.

Alas, 'tis true, I have gone here and there,  
And made myself a motley to the view,  
Gored mine own thoughts, sold cheap what is most dear. . .

## CXI.

Oh, for my sake do you with Fortune chide,  
The guilty goddess of the harmful deeds,  
That did not better for my life provide,  
Than public means, which public manner breeds,  
Thence come it that my name receives a brand,  
And almost then my nature is subdued  
To what it works in, like the dyer's hand:  
Pity me then, and wish I were renewed. . . .

But we must not lay too much stress upon such outpourings as these. Shakespeare could boil over into poetry on any subject, and the above views may not have been his own, but just fictitious emotion.

The practice of the art of acting is apt to have a disastrous effect on highly-strung and strongly-emotional temperaments; such Shakespeare's must have been. In this case, I cannot but think that his having been an actor led him on occasions to overflow with easily aroused emotion and to indulge in high-flown whirlwinds of passion, o'erstepping the modesty of nature and making the judicious grieve. We see this in many places in the plays. It may have been at some such results as these, of which he was aware, that he glanced in the two Sonnets just quoted.

But Shakespeare's gifts as an imaginative poet must often have antagonised him against his calling, not only of actor, but of a playwright bound to turn out plays to order. His longings as a poet and his love of the country must frequently have pulled strongly one way, when his duty as a father with a family to provide for, the demands of his theatrical work and the calls upon his pen tugged irresistibly in the other direction. Probably the visits which we are told that he paid to his home were a means of escape from the noise and racket of an actor's life in the busy metropolis; he would find in the companionship of his wife, children, and country friends a welcome change and refreshment.

And may we not assume that his plays would have been less slipshod in their construction and less melodramatic, more poetical and less theatrical, had he been free to work where he listed, when the spirit moved him, and had not been harassed by being bound to turn out such work as was most calculated to bring money into the theatre of which he was part manager?

On one side of his nature he was a very practical man, and he was the partner of practical men, who would fight hard against his writing anything that would run counter to ascertained public tastes. Far superior as they were in poetic merit to the work of any of his competitors, his plays—as acting plays—were of the same calibre as theirs. Few, if any, of them would have held their place for long upon the stage had it not been for the splendour of their poetry and the occasional glory of their characterisation.

The public for whom he slaved was much like the public of our own time, though they could stomach a brutality and bloodiness at which we revolt even when sugar-coated by honey-tongued Shakespeare. The few educated and discerning playgoers were swamped by the many of primitive tastes and desires. The average man in those as in these days led a hard-working, drab, unromantic existence, and he went to the bear-baiting or to the theatre to escape from it.

There is a process of the mind known as "identification," which helps to the understanding of the audience for which Shakespeare wrote and to which his actors had to suit their playing; it also helps us somewhat to see Shakespeare's attitude of mind towards his own creations. This process is succinctly described by Doctor Bernard Hart in "The Psychology of Insanity." He says that identification "consists in identifying ourselves with another individual, either real or fictitious, so that we experience his joys, sorrows, and desires as if they were our own. . . . One of the best instances is afforded by the reader of a second-rate romantic novel.



The explanation of the interest which this type of fiction arouses lies in the fact that the reader identifies himself with the hero, lives with him through a series of astonishing adventures, falls in love with the heroine, and lives happily ever afterwards. . . . An even better example is presented by the audience of a melodrama. Everybody who has observed the gallery during an entertainment of this kind is aware that its inmates are living on the stage, and always, of course, in the part of the hero or heroine. The illusion of reality which attaches to the play allows the day-dreaming to be conducted much more efficiently than in the case of a novel. . . . It is because the audience insists that its day-dreaming be catered for, that the playwright is compelled to provide a liberal supply of peers, and to cast his scenes not too far from Mayfair."

We can picture Shakespeare watching the audience in the Globe "rising" at all the cruder parts of his play, shouting with delight when there was a fierce fight, spellbound by the pomp and circumstance of courts and of spectacular processions, dazzled with fine clothes and gorgeous trappings, and greeting with full-lunged ecstasy the more blatant efforts of the tragedians and the buffoonery of the clowns; the while many of his best lines passed unheeded in the turmoil of the quick traffic of the stage. The queer thing is, that this public stood so much poetry and so many entirely charming scenes: this public that demanded with insatiable appetite crude fun and crudest melodrama. He gave them all they asked for, and much else in addition. We of to-day look at his plays and at his characters from a very different viewpoint from that of the Elizabethan playgoer, to whom "Hamlet" must have been a strenuous drama of bloody revenge and Shylock a figure of fun at which to jeer.

Then, as now, the best Shakespeare must have been caviare to the general in the theatre. Perhaps Shakespeare did not mind very much; he was business man as well as poet.

A further comment of Doctor Hart's is worth notice:—

“If we rise higher in the scale of art and consider the first-rate novel, or play, we find the mechanism of identification still at work, but appearing now in a less simple form. The reader no longer identifies himself merely with the hero, but rather with all the characters at once. He finds portrayed the complexes, or partial, tendencies, which exist in his own mind—and in the action of the novel he reads the conflicts and struggles which he experiences in his own life. Precisely the same remarks are applicable to the first-rate play. The reason that such productions only appeal to a limited class is that they pre-suppose in their audience the possession of mental processes sufficiently complicated to enable this identification to occur.”

Of course, neither Shakespeare nor any other dramatist ever consciously reasoned thus; but as an actor he was in touch with his public; he had ever at hand the theatrical thermometer of the box-office returns; he knew what fare it paid to set before the people, what meat would satisfy their hunger; and he was bound to provide it or to seek another means of livelihood.

Fortunately for him, and still more so for us, there is always a double element in the average theatre-going crowd: the groundlings, who can only identify themselves with the typical hero and heroines, or with typical emotions and actions of the characters; and those who can feel and see deeper, “the limited class,” who can appreciate a fine play or the fine things in a bad play.

We are all children of a lesser or of a greater growth: we all intensely want at times to escape from our surroundings and to make-believe. Children batten on books of adventure, or play-act at being anything but what they are. Love of colour in life is part of the make-up of the healthy man and woman. We grown-ups seek this compensation in various ways: in the sensuous ceremonials of religion, in the temporary visions and forgetfulnesses of

drink or of drugs, in fiction, in poetry, in the theatre. The grown-up public of Shakespeare's day was thus thirsty; he gave them blood and brutality, lust and love, hate and revenge, romance, comedy, tragedy, farce—all that they demanded; gave them kings and queens, statesmen and warriors, priests and penitents, country clowns and town fools; lovers galore, with faithful hearts almost always and sometimes quite undeservedly rewarded; and over all he spread the magic of his splendid verse and prose.

In his work, and even as he trod the boards as actor, Shakespeare himself found means of escape from the prose of life and forgetfulness of the irking compulsion of having to make himself "a motley to the view," escape from the hard fact that fortune did not better for his "life provide" than to condemn him to write for bread and butter and his home. Was not his nature subdued while he was identifying himself with the creations of his imagination? The characters and some of the scenes of his plays must have taken him away from real life. He escaped with Orlando to Arden, went with Florizel to Bohemia, journeying to a host of undiscovered countries in a vast variety of good company.

Had he not so identified himself with his creations, his work would have been lifeless and his characters no more than clothes-horses; he could not have written the verses of ringing love and passion, of beautiful dreams and lovely fancies that still stir our hearts, enabling us in turn to identify ourselves with many of the children of his imagination.

It is noticeable, as probably the outcome of his unconscious endeavour to escape from his environment, that there is little of what would to-day be called realism in Shakespeare's plays; the emotions are real again and again, but there are few realistic pictures of the life around him, such as we find in the plays of many of his contemporaries, always excepting his scenes of country life and a few comic London characters. The artist,

especially the poet, endeavours in his work to escape from that in his real life with which he is not in sympathy or which jars upon him.

Shakespeare fled to a world of romance or high above the emotions of average men and women when he was doing his best work, that is to say when he was not working against the grain.

He takes with him all those who are willing and able to keep him company.

## CHAPTER IX

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### EARLY PLAYS (I)

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IT is not my intention to narrate the details of Shakespeare's life, but to confine myself to those happenings and surroundings which must have influenced his mental development and work. The idea of attempting this task was suggested to me by the outcome of a careful study of the lives in conjunction with their works of several of my favourite authors, among them Miss Austen, Goldsmith, Thackeray, Dickens, Thoreau and Walt Whitman. With the life of Dickens, in particular, it is possible to become very intimate; the mass of biographical material is almost unmanageable. I found that the more I learned of the events, even the minute details, of his life, the more clearly could I trace the working of his imagination, and what imagination really is and can accomplish. This process must, to a great extent, be reversed with regard to Shakespeare.

I found that the chief difficulty was that I could not start with decks clear; they were lumbered up with so much rubbish "inherited from dead books of large pretensions" which I had read in the days of my youth. Says Walt Whitman: "You shall no longer take things at second or third hand, nor look through the eyes of the dead, nor feed on the spectres in books."

It was necessary to throw overboard as much as possible of this lumber. To get rid of it all is impossible;

some of it will lurk in dark corners, rushing out into consciousness at unwelcome moments to the confusion of free thinking. In order to help myself, I drew up the chart which appears in the Appendix to this volume. Among the "events" I included only what I believed to be ascertained facts, and not all of those; the dates of the plays are, of course, no more than conjectural, but a careful reading of them in this order makes one *feel* that they follow on quite naturally, and that this order must be practically right, though the precise dates may sometimes be doubtful. To put it another way, had we no outside evidence of the order of composition, internal evidence of progressing skill and of growing maturity would lead us to arrange them much in this sequence.

We must not forget, however, that we have clues only to the dates of production; we do not know, and I fear never shall, exactly when they were composed, or how long he was at work on any play. A play may have simmered long in his mind before he set to work to get it down on paper.

The title page of "Venus and Adonis" is dated 1593, and Shakespeare speaks vaguely of the poem as "the first heyre of my invention." This should not be construed as meaning literally the first verse he wrote; it is obviously too expert work to have been that. I think that many of the Sonnets had already been composed, and it is nearly certain that he had written, or produced whatever may have been his share of, "Titus Andronicus," "Love's Labour's Lost," "The Comedy of Errors," and the three parts of "King Henry VI."

When Shakespeare began to write for the stage, the English drama was in the hotblood of its youth, full of almost superabundant energy and the joy of freedom from the shackles of tradition. Tumultuous and unruly: free! As Sir Sidney Lee says: "It was when the first performers of the crude infant drama, Lyly, Greene, Peele, Kyd, and Marlow, were busy with their experiments that Shakespeare joined the ranks of English dramatists. As

he set out on his road he profited by the lessons which these men were teaching. Kyd and Greene left more or less definite impressions on all Shakespeare's early efforts. But Lyly in comedy and Marlowe in tragedy may be reckoned the masters to whom he stood in the relation of disciple on the threshold of his career." Very naturally the exuberant and fiery muse of Marlowe would attract and affect the young poet. Even had he had the inclination, of which he never at any time showed any symptom, to try experiments and to strike out lines of his own, he would not have been encouraged in such a course by the practical and experienced men for whom he worked. Theatrical managers in those days, as in these, must please to live, and are only too ready to stick to what they believe to be the safest way to avoid losses. They give the public that for which the public has already shown fondness. Change in the style of theatrical productions comes about slowly. To quote Sir Sidney Lee again: "In all external regards Shakespeare's experience can be matched by that of his comrades. The outward features of his career as a dramatist, no less than as an actor, were cast in the current mould. In his prolific industry, in his habit of seeking his fable in pre-existing literature, in his co-operation with other pens, in his avowals of deference to popular tastes, he faithfully followed the common paths. It was solely in the supreme quality of his poetic and dramatic achievement that he parted company with his fellows."

Whether or not "*Titus Andronicus*" was Shakespeare's first dramatic production matters little; there can be no doubt that it was one of his earliest, being one of his most immature works. There has been much argumentation as to how much or how little of this piece came from Shakespeare's pen. The hand of Shakespeare then was not the hand that wrote "*Hamlet*" or "*Macbeth*," and I believe that this accounts for much of the unlikeness in "*Titus*" to Shakespeare's later and matured work. I believe that the play is entirely his writing, reading throughout exactly as we should



expect young Shakespeare to write, being then in his imitative and experimental stage. To us the play is offensive, but so was Shakespeare elsewhere. It is crude, as is the work of youthful genius, as a rule. It was a rehash most likely of an old piece, which, maybe, was sufficiently popular to be worth writing up.

As regards Shakespeare's earlier works, there is this very useful evidence in Francis Mere's "*Palladis Tamia*," published in 1598:—

"As the Soule of Euphorbus was thought to live in Pythagoras, so the sweete wittie soule of Ovid lives in mellifluous and honey-tongued Shakespeare; witness his Venus and Adonis, his *Lucrece*, his sugred Sonnets among his private friends, etc. As Plautus and Seneca are accounted the best for comedy and tragedy among the Latines, so Shakespeare among the English is the most excellent in both kinds for the stage; for comedy, witness his *Gentleman of Verona*, his *Errors*, his *Love's Labours Lost*, his *Love's Labours Wonne*, his *Midsummers Night Dreame*, and his *Merchant of Venice*; for tragedy, his *Richard 2*, *Richard the 3*, *Henry the 4*, *King John*, *Titus Andronicus*, and his *Romeo and Juliet*.

"As Epius Stolo said the Muses would speak with Plautus tongue, if they would speak Latin, so I say that the Muses would speak with Shakespeare's fine filed phrase, if they would speak English."

Which shows the repute in which Shakespeare was then held, and, also, the fact that "*Titus Andronicus*" was then looked on as his work.

Doctor Madden passes judgment that there is no trace of Shakespeare's hand in Act I. of this play, but that in the succeeding Acts the work of another writer is apparent, proceeding to apply his tests of Shakespeare's well-proven love of the dawn of day and his peculiar use of the terms of the chase, etc.

Among the passages he quotes in support of his belief in Shakespeare's hand in these later Acts are:—



Advanc'd above pale envy's threatening reach,  
 As when the golden sun salutes the morn,  
 And, having gilt the ocean with his beams.  
 Gallops the Zodiac in his glistening coach,  
 And over-looks the highest peering hills.

And this:—

What, hast not thou full often struck a doe,  
 And borne her cleanly by the keeper's nose?

And this:—

The hunt is 'up, the morn is bright and grey,  
 The fields are fragrant and the woods are green :  
 Uncouple here and let us make a bay,  
 And wake the emperor and his lovely bride  
 And rouse the prince, and ring a hunter's peal,  
 And all the Court may echo with the noise.

And this:—

The birds chant melody on every bush,  
 And snake lies rolled in the cheerful sun.  
 The green leaves quiver with the cooling wind  
 And make a chequered shadow on the ground :

. . . . .

And, whilst the babbling echo mocks the hounds,  
 Replying shrilly to the well-tuned horns,  
 As if a double hunt were heard at once,  
 Let us sit down, and mark their yelping noise.

And this:—

As true a dog as ever fought at head.

These and others given, as Doctor Madden says, are characteristic of Shakespeare's work. He refers to the inclusion of this play in the Folio, judiciously saying: "If Shakespeare had no part in the composition, what induced the editors to print it as his? The poorer the play, the less the temptation to foist it upon the public as Shakespeare's." Quite so, and the Editors were close friends and old colleagues of the dead dramatist, anxious for due honour to be done to his memory.

As to the plot being full of loathsome details, this is no proof that Shakespeare did not write the piece, or at least rewrite an older play. In later days he handled themes quite as unsavoury, but he did it with riper judgment and greater skill. As a young writer, he would be most anxious to make a success, and he must have known that the public loved to sup on just such horrors as are contained in "Titus Andronicus." We are apt to forget that he did not write for *us*, but for his employers and for his particular public. Who are we of to-day that we should tell his friends that a play was not written by him when they tell us that it was?

The very first lines of Act I. have to me a young Shakespeare ring:—

Noble patricians, patrons of my right,  
Defend the justice of my cause with arms;  
And countrymen, my loving followers,  
Plead my successive titles with your swords, etc.

Then, "Romans, friends, followers, favourers of my right" has a very familiar sound.

There are many bad lines and poor passages, but what else would you expect in the early work even of Shakespeare? He was, after all, a man, and not a demi-god, and, therefore, had to learn. If the plot had been a clean one, I don't think the question of authorship would ever have been raised.

When re-reading it lately, I noticed this. In Scene 1, Act II., Demetrius says:—

She is a woman, therefore to be woo'd;  
She is a woman therefore may be won.

Compare this with "Richard III.," Act I., Scene 2, where Gloucester says:—

Was ever woman in this humour woo'd?  
Was ever woman in this humour won?

And this. "The Two Gentlemen of Verona," Act III., Scene 1:—

That man that hath a tongue, I say, is no man,  
If with his tongue he cannot win a woman.

And this. "The First Part of King Henry VI.," Act V.,  
Scene 3:—

She's beautiful and therefore to be woo'd,  
She is a woman therefore to be won.

And this. "A Midsummer Night's Dream," Act II.,  
Scene 1. Helena says:—

We cannot fight for love, as men may do;  
We should be woo'd and were not made to woo.

Returning to "Titus," Act IV., Scene 1, we find mention of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, brought in quite unnecessarily; any other book would have suited the occasion as well; and, close after, a reference to the "tragic tale of Philomel," of which Shakespeare seems to have been fond. Immediately following are references to Tarquin and Lucrece, another favourite with the dramatist and elaborated by him into a long poem. Again, a little later on, to Brutus and Lucrece.

## CHAPTER X

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### EARLY PLAYS (II)

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PASSING from "Titus Andronicus" to "Love's Labour's Lost" is like going from a decorated charnel house into the sunlight, or, rather, into the sunrise, for the latter play bubbles over with the ebullience of a youthful poet. But though Shakespeare is here his most joyous self, he is still hampered by imitativeness. In this case Lyly the Euphuist is his pattern. Traces of the influence of the writer of "Euphues" are to be found in far later work of Shakespeare. On the title-page of the Quarto edition of 1598 we have the play described as "A Pleasant Conceited Comedy," exactly what it is, very pleasant and full of conceits. There is some capital Shakespearean fooling, and quite a few touches of sportsmanship. Here is what may have been a memory of a happening in his father's house, Shakespeare making Holofernes say:—

I do dine to-day at the father's of a certain pupil of mine; where, if (being repast) it shall please you to gratify the table with a grace, I will, on my privilege I have with the parents of the aforesaid child or pupil, undertake your *ben venuto*. (Act IV., Ss. 2).

It is not at all improbable that Shakespeare's master did visit Shakespeare's father.

We now come to that jolly bit of fooling, "The Comedy of Errors," which was first printed in the Folio

of 1623. We should never forget to be grateful to the friends of Shakespeare who were responsible for issuing this edition of his works, for without it we might have lost many of his plays. They were our friends as well as his.

"The Comedy of Errors" is just a capital, poetical farce. There is not very much of Shakespeare's self to note in it.

In Act I., Scene 2, there is a passage which may have been a memory of the writer's arrival in London:—

I'll view the manners of the town,  
Peruse the traders, gaze upon the buildings,  
And then return, and sleep within mine inn.

And there are a few typical Shakespeare sporting allusions.

For convenience, and not troubling too much about exact chronology, it will be well next to take together the three parts of the "Henry VI." trilogy, presumably Shakespeare's first attempt at historical drama. It is not necessary to venture into the interminable controversy as to how much of these dry plays was the work of Shakespeare, but I will point out this. Even in the days of his maturity, working apparently in haste and at high pressure, he turned out much poor stuff in this *genre*, quite unworthy of his genius as a poet. Why, then, should we reject these early plays because they compare badly with his later achievements in the greater works? As well might we deny the authenticity of much of the early writing of Keats, Shelley, Wordsworth, and others. Even genius, as a rule, has to learn to fly, and the first efforts are rather ineffective. At the time which we are considering, Shakespeare was in his experimental, imitative stage, and the verse and prose that he turned out then was, as a whole, utterly unlike and inferior to what was to follow. Only here and there do we find gleams of the glory to come and typical instances of methods and mannerisms which afterward came to be identified with his work.

Shakespeare's share in "Henry VI." was apparently the immediate cause of Greene's outburst of spleen, for in his diatribe he refers to the "upstart crow, beautified in our feathers, that, with his Tygers heart wrapt in a Players hide," etc. A strange fowl, indeed! In "Henry VI.," Third Part, Act I., Scene 4, there is the line:—

O tiger's heart wrapp'd in a woman's hide.

The editors of the Folio tell us that these three "Henry VI." plays were written by Shakespeare; they must have known what they were talking about, and there were many who were in a position to contradict them, and who would doubtless have done so, if they were in error. It is argued that the verse is very poor stuff and for the most part unworthy of him, all sorts of finicky metrical tests being applied; this does not prove that the young Shakespeare did not write it. The cruel mis-statement of the character of Joan of Arc, we are told, could not have been perpetrated by him. Why not? If he had pictured her otherwise than he has done, that would be the wonder. Shakespeare knew and cared as little about the veracity of his history as did his contemporaries; that is to say, he did not worry about it at all. Often in his mature days he shamefully mangles historical truth. The average Englishman of that day no more understood the character of Joan of Arc than for many years did Englishmen understand that of Oliver Cromwell. I am told by his friends and colleagues that Shakespeare did write "Henry VI.," and I find no reason for impugning either their honesty or their knowledge. That Shakespeare revised old work is undoubted, but that does not prove that at any rate the most part of the dialogue was not his writing, or that he did not approve of the scheme and characterisation of the plays. Doctor Madden says respecting the "originals" of the plays: "A comparison of these old dramas with the plays as printed in the Folio, discloses precisely the same process as that by which the comedy of 1594 was transmuted into 'The Taming of the Shrew.' Certain passages rewritten and become instinct with life

and racy of the soil. Vague or inaccurate allusions become truthful and striking, and some distinctively Shakespearean touches are added."

Shakespeare altered and added when he thought change was called for; so that he must take the blame or the praise not only for what he actually wrote but also for what he thought it right to retain. If not the sole constructor and writer of these plays, Shakespeare must be held responsible for having given his name to all therein; he fathered them and in the opinion of those "in the know" was their author. If he had considered them a discredit to his name and fame, among others his friends and fellow-players, Heminge and Condell, must have known that he did so.

But all this fighting about the exact share that Shakespeare had in the writing and composition of "Henry VI." interests me only because it is so typical an example of setting the cart before the horse. I am told that because for the most part these plays are such poor stuff they cannot for the most part have been the work of Shakespeare! To me they seem to have been just such poor stuff as a beginner, however clever, would have written.

The works fit in exactly with what, I hold, at that date would have been Shakespeare's capacity and want of experience and of knowledge. Shakespeare's mind, skill, art, gift of expression, developed in a normal not a supernatural way. There lie the long and the short of it.

In Act I., Scene 5, of Part I., there is this pleasant country-life touch:—

So bees with smoke, and doves with noisome stench,  
Are from their hives and houses driven away.  
They call'd us for our fierceness English dogs;  
Now, like whelps, we crying run away.

And in Act II., Scene 3, is this:—

Between two hawks, which flies the higher pitch;  
Between two dogs, which hath the deeper mouth.

And is not this prophetic of a Falstaff scene? Act III., Scene 2:—

*Sir John Fastolfe.* Whither away! to save myself by flight.

We are like to have the overthrow again.

*Captain.* What! will you fly, and leave Lord Talbot?

*Fast.* Ay,

All the Talbots in the world, to save my life.

*Capt.* Cowardly knight!

This bit must have stuck in the back regions of Shakespeare's memory, and floated into consciousness again when he was working up the character of the fat, cowardly knight.

No one but a sportsman could have written the description in Act IV., Scene 2, when Talbot speaks of the English as

. . . park'd and bounded in a pale,

A little herd of England's timorous deer.

In the Second Part occur the following passages. Act II., Scene 3, a typical touch of tavern talk:—

*First Neighbour.* Here, neighbour Horner, I drink to you in a cup of sack. . . .

*Second Neighbour.* And here, neighbours, here's a cup of charnico.

*Third Neighbour.* And here's a pot of good double beer.

Another country-life touch. Act IV., Scene 2:—

*Dick.* She was, indeed a pedlar's daughter, and sold many laces.

*Smith.* But now of late, not able to travel with her furred pack, she washes bucks here at home.

"Bucks" come up again in "The Merry Wives of Windsor."

This is followed shortly by a homely speech from Cade:—

There shall be in England seven half-penny loaves sold for a penny; the three-hooped pot shall have ten hoops; and



I will make it felony to drink small beer. All the realm shall be in common, and in Cheapside shall my palfrey go to grass.

In Act V., Scene 1, a reference to bear-baiting, which would delight the "sports" in the audience:—

*Clifford.* Are these thy bears? We'll bait thy bears to death.  
And manacle the bear-ward in their chains.  
If thou dar'st bring them to the baiting-place.

*Richard.* Oft have I seen a hot o'erweening cur  
Run back and bite, because he was withheld;  
Who, being suffered with the bear's fell paw,  
Hath clapped his tail between his legs and cried.

In the Third Part we find another bear bit, in Act II., Scene 1:—

. . . as a bear, encompass'd round with dogs,  
Who having pricked a few and made them cry,  
The rest stand all aloof and bark at him.

Shakespeare was evidently as keenly observant at the bear-ring as he was elsewhere.

Country-life and sport. Act III., Scene 1:—

*First Keeper.* Under this thick-grown brake we'll shroud ourselves:  
For through this laund anon the deer will come;  
And in this covert will we make our stand,  
Calling the principal of all the deer.

*Second Keeper.* I'll stay above the hill, so both may shoot.

*First Keeper.* That cannot be; the noise of thy cross-bow  
Will scare the herd, and so my shoot is lost.  
Here we stand both, and aim we at the best:  
And, for the time shall not seem tedious,  
I'll tell thee what befell me on a day  
In this self place where now we mean to stand.

But, alas! we never hear what befell.

These lines, full of quite uncalled-for and realistic detail, must surely be reminiscent; lurking in unconscious memory, the stimulus that summoned it to consciousness

having been, perhaps, a single word, such as a "forest," or "keeper." These words do not appear in the Folio in the stage directions, but they were in the writer's mind as the scene was in his mind's eye.

We may now take two plays which show a great advance, both in the handling of character and in the writing, "Richard III." and the "Two Gentlemen of Verona."

It seems to be generally admitted that "Richard III." is Shakespeare unadulterated, and it follows historically the Third Part of "Henry VI." It is rattling good historical melodrama, lifted out of the rut of such things by some gorgeous poetry. It afforded Richard Burbage a fine chance of strenuous acting, of which apparently he availed himself to the full.

There is not much that need be said here about this play, except that, as a whole, it shows a most marked advance upon "Henry VI." The action goes swiftly; the verse is valiant and vigorous, and the character-drawing, though quite conventional, is amply good enough for the occasion. Richard is no more than the stage-type of melodramatic monster, but as such he is as well done as could be, and there is a distinct and not unsuccessful attempt to put some individuality into the women folk.

There is a capital little bit of London in the third Scene of Act II. :—

*1st Cit.* Good morrow, neighbour; whither away so fast?

*2nd Cit.* I promise you, I scarcely know myself;

Heard you the news abroad?

*1st Cit.* Yes, that the King is dead?

*2nd Cit.* Ill news, by'r Lady, seldom comes the better:

I fear, I fear, 'twill prove a giddy world.

*Enter another Citizen.*

*3rd Cit.* Neighbours, God speed!

*1st Cit.* Give you good morrow, sir.

*3rd Cit.* Doth the news hold of good King Edward's death?

*2nd Cit.* Ay, sir, it is too true, God help the while!

- 3rd Cit.* Then masters, look to see a troublous world.
- 1st Cit.* No, no; by God's good grace, his son shall reign.
- 3rd Cit.* Woe to the land that's govern'd by a child!
- 2nd Cit.* In him there is a hope of government,  
Which in his nonage, council under him,  
And, in his full and ripened years, himself,  
No doubt, shall, then and till then, govern well.
- 1st Cit.* So stood the state, when Henry the sixth  
Was crowned at Paris when but nine months old.
- 3rd Cit.* Stood the state so? No, no, good friends, God wot!  
For then this land was famously enrich'd  
With politic grave counsel; then the king  
Had virtuous uncles to protect his grace.
- 1st Cit.* Why, so hath this, both by his father and mother.
- 3rd Cit.* Better it were they all came by his father,  
Or by his father there were none at all;  
For emulation, who shall now be nearest,  
Will touch us all too near, if God prevent not.  
O! full of danger is the Duke of Gloucester,  
And the queen's sons and brothers haught and proud;  
And, were they to be rul'd, and not to rule,  
This sickly land might solace as before.
- 1st Cit.* Come, come, we fear the worst; all will be well.
- 3rd Cit.* When clouds be seen, wise men put on their cloaks;  
When green leaves fall, then winter is at hand;  
When the sun sets, who doth not look for night?  
Untimely storms make men expect a dearth.  
All may be well; but, if God sort it so,  
'Tis more than we deserve, or I expect.
- 2nd Cit.* Truly, the hearts of men are full of fear:  
You cannot reason almost with a man,  
That looks not heavily and full of dread.
- 3rd Cit.* Before the days of change, still is it so:  
By a divine instinct, men's minds mistrust  
Pursuing danger; as, by proof, we see  
The water swell before a boisterous storm.  
But leave it all to God. Whither away?
- 2nd Cit.* Marry, we were sent for to the justices.
- 3rd Cit.* And so was I: I'll bear you company.

This seems to me to be quite the finest scene in the play; it is homely, but it is full of fate, and the little sketches of the three citizens are admirably touched in.

But "The Two Gentlemen of Verona" possesses far more interest than "Richard III." for the student of the developing dramatist and poet. It contains examples of his typical faults and merits. It shows that Shakespeare was still greatly under the influence of Lyly, that he had not yet quite found himself, but that he was well on the way to do so. His experience of life was growing fuller, his knowledge of men and women increasing, his touch both in verse and in prose gaining strength. The comedy shows advance both in mind and in art, in thought and in expression.

The plot deals with the romantic adventures of a quartette of lovers, and Shakespeare's favourite device of a woman disguising herself as a man is used. Also in Launce and Speed we have two quite Shakespearean serving-men.

Shakespeare shows in this as in many other plays utter indifference to the conduct of his plot. He does not seem to care to take the trouble to render the behaviour of his characters credible. Could anyone believe that Valentine could forgive the base treachery and lying of his bosom friend and trusted confidant, Proteus? It jars badly. Then there is the Duke, who would, presumably, have been a man of some experience, but who is as easily gulled by Proteus as would have been any callow youth. And what kind of a woman was Sylvia to take so calmly Valentine's proposal to hand her over to Proteus? And how could she swoon when she thought she had lost so poor a thing as that young man, and then call him to her arms at a moment's notice? Finally, there is the crowning absurdity of the Duke's forgiveness of the outlaws and his taking them into "great employment." But this huddling up of the end of a plot is common with Shakespeare. His lovers forgive any neglect, however great, on the smallest provocation in the

way of repentance. In one of his latest works, "A Winter's Tale," he allows the Queen, who has retired for years, deeply wronged by a silly husband, at last to throw herself gladly into his arms! Yet there are many who hold up Shakespeare as a master of stage-craft, and as gifted with an insight into the hearts of men and women which has neither been surpassed nor equalled.

Some, however, of the characters in "Two Gentlemen of Verona" are an advance upon those in the preceding plays. Thurio is a capital fop; Eglamour a very decent fellow; Julia's host is quite alive; Speed and Launce amusing, despite their verbal quips, which grow tedious—Shakespeare dearly loved a pun!—and Julia, admitting her too great weakness for weak Proteus, is quite a charming lass.

There is a bit of London and a bit of country-life worth noting.

Act II., Scene 5. Launce says:—

I reckon this always—that a man is never undone till he be hang'd; nor never welcome to a place till some certain shot be paid, and the hostess say "Welcome!"

*Speed.* Come on, you madcap, I'll to the alehouse with you presently; there, for one shot of five pence, thou shalt have five thousand welcomes.

Herein Shakespeare shows his wonted indifference to "local colour"; this is scarcely the talk of two Italian servants.

Then, at the close of the same scene, Launce tells Speed that he is not worthy the name of Christian; because he has not so much charity in him "as to go to the ale with a Christian." The "ale," of course, being the old-world country festival, so well depicted in "The Diary of Master William Silence."

## CHAPTER XI

### THE POEMS

IN trying to go deeply into Shakespeare's mind at this period of his life and work, it is necessary to look into his poems. They are:—

<i>a.</i> Venus and Adonis	...	...	...	Published	1593.
<i>b.</i> Lucrece	...	...	...	„	1594.
<i>c.</i> The Passionate Pilgrim	...	...	...	„	1599.
<i>d.</i> The Phoenix and Turtle	...	...	...	„	1601.
<i>e.</i> Sonnets	...	...	...	„	1609.

The dates of publication of the last three give no clue to the date of composition.

#### *a.*

“Venus and Adonis” was entered at Stationers’ Hall on April 18th, 1593, and was issued from the press in the same year. The title-page includes this:—“Imprinted by Richard Field, and are to be sold at the signe of the white Greyhound in Paules Church-yard.” The author’s name does not appear on the title, but is appended to the Dedication.

We do not know at what date the poem was written, and the poet’s statement that it was “the first heyre” of his invention conveys no definite information. That he had not written any verse before this is not credible. He could not have suddenly acquired the skill to compose this long poem, which, as Sir Sidney Lee says, “is

affluent in beautiful imagery and metrical sweetness," and which is without doubt the work of a practised if immature pen. What have become of his earlier flights we don't know; we might not find in them anything which would add to his reputation, but certainly they would help us to an understanding of his development. Maybe he brought some of them to town with him, and showed them about among his private friends, but did not consider them worthy of publication; maybe he left them at home; maybe he destroyed them. We don't know, and must leave it at that.

"Venus and Adonis" achieved immediate popularity, at least six editions being issued in the poet's lifetime. It placed him at a bound among the recognised poets of the day.

It is written throughout with a luxuriance of diction, a pomp of language and a warmth of colour that is in strange contrast with his dramatic work of the same period, and I cannot but feel that he was hampered when working in the dramatic medium, in which he had not yet made himself at home and did not dare to be himself. In "Venus and Adonis" he was free to go as he pleased; he was not writing at the dictation of his theatrical masters; he had not to keep an eye on the work of his predecessors, or to bear in mind the audience by which plays were damned or applauded. He was young, not yet thirty, boiling over with life and energy; he "let himself go."

The poem could not have been written by anyone who did not know and love the country and field sports. How thoroughly Shakespearean is this:—

Lo, here the gentle lark, weary of rest,  
From his moist cabinet mounts up on high,  
And wakes the morning, from whose silver breast  
The sun ariseth in his majesty;  
Who doth the world so gloriously behold,  
That cedar-tops and hills seem burnish'd gold.



Shakespeare loved the early hours of the day, as do all good sportsmen; most poets show a preference for sunsets.

But the poem must be read through in order to appreciate how fully crammed it is with knowledge of the horse, the chase and so forth. There is that wonderful description of "Adonis' trampling courser," of the pursuit of the purblind hare, and so much else.

*b.*

The success of "Venus and Adonis" would naturally suggest to Shakespeare that it would be wise to follow it up, as quickly as might be, with another poem on similar lines. On May 9th, 1594, "The Ravishment of Lucrece" was entered at Stationers' Hall, and was published in the same year, Field again being the printer.

Mr. Knox Pooler sums up the situation nicely. Compared with its predecessor, "Lucrece," he says, is "at once less interesting and more respectable." On attempting a re-reading, I found I had not the patience to get through it. I am in good company, for in Samuel Butler's "Note-Books" there is this bit of frank common sense: "I have been trying to read 'Venus and Adonis' and the 'Rape of Lucrece,' but cannot get on with them. They teem with fine things, but they are got-up fine things." I cannot agree about "Venus and Adonis," but I do feel that "Lucrece" is a thing of effort. It is dull and laboured; it was not written because it *had* to come forth, but because the author wished to write another long poem. It is as dull as the uninspired portions of some of the plays. It is evident that Shakespeare's genius was quiescent as he laboured at this poem, that his *mind* was too intent on the work. The first poem he felt; he dug out the second. Really the most helpful information to be gathered from it is that the poet realised as a business man that it was incumbent on him to turn out what the public would buy. He was not the first or the last poet to do this. Also, he may have wished to meet



some expressed desire of his patron, Lord Southampton. We do not know why this was the last long poem he published; maybe because he found that there was more money to be made out of play-making.

The three other works included in the list of Shakespeare's poems were not published until after the period now under consideration, but some at least of their contents must, and others may, belong to early times.

*c.*

The title-page of "The Passionate Pilgrim" reads:—"The Passionate Pilgrime by W. Shakespeare. At London Printed for W. Jaggard, and are to be sold by W. Leake, at the Greyhound in Paules Churchyard, 1599." The collection contains twenty short poems, of which five only are by Shakespeare, including two of the Sonnets, Nos. CXXXVIII. and CXLIV., and three excerpts from "Love's Labour's Lost." Heywood, in his "Apologie for Actors," 1612, states that Shakespeare was "much offended with M. Jaggard that (altogether unknowne to him) presumed to make so bold with his name." That Jaggard thought it worth doing so shows that Shakespeare's work found a ready market.

*d.*

In 1601, with sundry matters by other hands, appeared "The Turtle and Phoenix," which I cannot believe to have been Shakespeare's work. Does anybody? It has no trace of his hand or mind.

*e.*

The Sonnets! A great deal more ink has been spilled over these than was called for, the reason being that there are many so minded that when they cannot see daylight they cannot refrain from scenting a mystery.

In Elizabethan days everybody, at least everybody who could turn a verse, went a-somneting, writing of

love-in-play for the most part, and paying extravagant compliments to their friends, male and female. It can surely be said that Shakespeare's efforts in this line stand far above the vast majority of Elizabethan and Jacobean sonnets; but they vary greatly in merit, many being little more than a mass of verbal and conventional conceits, sometimes approaching perilously near to nonsense, and full of Euphuistic verbiage.

From about 1590 onward a veritable deluge of sonnets poured from the press, and doubtless many more were written and not published, being handed about among the writers' long-suffering friends. Most of these productions are full of vain conceits and conventional vapourings. Michael Drayton's sequence of sixty-three sonnets, "*Idea*," published in 1619, holds a high place among their rivals, and contains, among other good things, the fine "Since there's no help, come, let us kiss and part." In these sonnets are lines, common in thought to Shakespeare and others, promising immortality to the victims to whom the sonnets were addressed:—

How many paltry foolish painted Things,  
That now in coaches trouble every street,  
Shall be forgotten (whom no Poet sings)  
Ere they be well wrapped in their winding Sheet!  
When I, to thee eternity shall give!

Better oblivion than for ever to have one's name attached to such lines as those.

Perhaps, when writing some of his sonnets, Shakespeare may have thought that which Drayton expressed:—

As other men, so I myself do muse  
Why in this sort I wrest Invention so?

The following may throw a gleam of light on the origin of some of Shakespeare's efforts:—

A witless Gallant, a young wench that wooed,  
(Yet his dull spirit, her not one jot could move).  
Intreated me, as e'er I wished his good,  
To write him but one Sonnet to his love.

It is quite likely that Shakespeare did receive and accede to such requests.

It would be easy to read all sorts of autobiographical references into Drayton's "Idea," as, also, into many other collections of sonnets, but Shakespeare's is, so far as I know, the only work that has been so abused. Where knowledge is lacking, commentators seem every ready to fill up with wildest conjectures, which are in time apt to be set forth as ascertained facts. Ignorance is the father of conjecture.

There are many other Sonnet series which are worth glancing at for purposes of comparison with Shakespeare's.

It would have been amazing had Shakespeare not written dozens of Sonnets and handed them about among his friends. It would have been still more astonishing had he shared with his friends at large his innermost secrets, exposing his heart and soul in verse to be bandied about. Would he have written down his love adventures in any form, supposing him to have had any of importance? Whether he strayed or did not in his loves we do not know. Why not leave it at that? Shakespeare could boil over with the imagined loves of men and women in his plays. Why should he not do so in his poems?

The Sonnets were published in 1609, and the title-page runs:—

Shakespeare's Sonnets. Never before imprinted. At London. By G. Eld for T.T. and are to be solde by John Wright, dwelling at Christ Church Gate.

T.T. (Thorpe), unfortunately, saw fit to provide a dedication. This:—

TO . THE . ONLIE . BEGETTER . OF .  
THESE . INSVING . SONNETS .  
MR . W . H . ALL . HAPPINESSE .  
AND . THAT . ETERNITIE .  
PROMISED

BY .

OVR . EVER-LIVING . POET .

WISHETH .

THE . WELL-WISHING .

ADVENTURER . IN .

SETTING .

FORTH .

T.T.

Had T.T. been a well-wisher to posterity, he would not have set forth this rigmarole, to drive commentators mad and their readers crazy. For myself, I am quite content to accept Sir Sidney Lee's verdict that the Sonnets were published piratically, and that in the dedication Thorpe expressed his thanks to the thief who brought him the MS. At any rate, the dedication has nothing to do with Shakespeare and the motives which induced him at various times to write Sonnets.

When were the Sonnets written? We do not know. Certainly not in a lump, but at various times and upon various provocations. Many of them are obviously no more than verses of occasion. In style, most of them are akin to the verses in the early plays and to the two long poems. Some of them may have been among his earliest attempts at verse making; young poets dearly love to write sonnets.

To my mind's ear few of these Sonnets ring with any tone of personal passion; they are almost un-Shakespearean in their *lack* of unchecked emotion, such as we find much of in "Venus and Adonis" and in "Romeo and Juliet." They are efforts.

The dividing up of the Sonnets into sequences has been done *ad nauseam*, always with a view to finding out some clue to a hidden love affair. What stupendous waste of time! Shakespeare's bones have been allowed to lie in peace. Why not give a rest to his Sonnets, at any rate so far as to abstain from seeking out secrets in them? But it is useless to hope for this.

I will only venture this far, and that only because I want to get as close to Shakespeare as I can without indulging in wild myth-making. I have already ventured to suggest that it is quite likely that some of the Sonnets may have been addressed to Mrs. Shakespeare. Why not?

Some of them, I admit, are very puzzling, but chiefly, I think, on account of the dire obscurity of the diction. There are those famous first seventeen, which are apparently addressed to a youth; but there is no evidence, internal or external, to lead us to conclude that the writer was not playing with an imaginary episode.

Is it possible that some of these "boy-theme" Sonnets were written to some of the young actors of the day, who played the parts of women upon the stage? There is a theme for some commentator to write a big book about!

The following might have been written with a presentation copy, either from himself, or from some other:—

## XXVI.

Lord of my love, to whom in vassalage  
 Thy merit hath my duty strongly knit,  
 To thee I send this written embassy,  
 To witness duty, not to show my wit.  
 Duty so great, which wit so poor as mine  
 May make seem bare, in wanting words to show it;  
 But that I hope some good conceit of thine  
 In thy soul's thought, all naked, will bestow it:  
 Till whatsoever star that guides by moving,  
 Points on me graciously with fair aspect,  
 And puts apparel on my tatter'd loving,  
 To show me worthy of thy sweet respect;  
 Then may I dare to boast how I do love thee,  
 Till then, not show my head where thou may'st prove me.

At any rate, we cannot find anything of passion in such conceits.

Indeed, read with an open mind, the vast majority of these poems seem to be no more than sheer sonneteering. Not in one of them is there foundation upon which to erect castles of conjecture inhabited by dark ladies and other wild folk. Had they not been written by him, these Sonnets would, for the most part, have long ago been forgotten. Whatever be their merits and demerits, they do not justify the conclusion that they contain any autobiographical information of importance.

Here may be quoted No. CXXX., which reads like a burlesque at his own expense, or at that of some of his sonneteering friends:—

## CXXX.

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun;  
Coral is far more red than her lips' red :  
If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun ;  
If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.  
I have seen roses damask'd, red and white,  
But no such roses see I in her cheeks ;  
And in some perfumes is there more delight  
Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks.  
I love to hear her speak,—yet well I know  
That music hath a far more pleasing sound ;  
I grant I never saw a goddess go,—  
My mistress, when she walks, treads on the ground ;  
And yet, by Heaven, I think my love is rare  
As any she belied with false compare.

There are glimpses of his Sonnet style in the plays, which are worth quoting, in order to show that the subjects of many of the Sonnets can scarcely be looked on as, at any rate, seriously autobiographical. A few must suffice to indicate their character.

"Romeo and Juliet," Act II., Scene I:—

*Rom.* O, she is rich in beauty; only poor  
That, when she dies, with beauty dies her store  
.  
.  
.  
For beauty, starved with her severity,  
Cuts beauty off from all posterity.

This is a common theme with all Elizabethan sonneteers. Compare Shakespeare's constant harping on the idea, especially in some of the Sonnets I.—XVII.

From "Twelfth Night," a late play, Act I., Scene 5:—

'Tis beauty blent, whose red and white  
Nature's own sweet and cunning hand laid on:  
Lady, you are the cruell'st she alive,  
If you will lead these graces to the grave  
And leave the world no copy.

The same old theme again!

The two men and the one lady-love theme is common to the Sonnets and the "Two Gentlemen of Verona," one a stage and the other a poetical elaboration of it.\*

It might repay the time and labour it would consume to pick out all the parallel passages in the plays, poems and the Sonnets. I believe the result would be to slay the Sonnet-autobiography myth.

By the way, if a man must be sought for who stole away one of Shakespeare's lady-loves, and so gave him a theme for a Sonnet sequence, why not fix upon his friend, Burbage? We know that tradition connects the two men in an adventure of this character, when William was the conqueror. Here is another suggestion for the Shakespearean myth-makers.

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\* See Sonnets XL and XLII.



## CHAPTER XII

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### GROWTH

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WE are now in a position to form a judgment as to what manner of man Shakespeare was when he wrote his early works, and in what way environment and the influences of his young days had worked upon his mind.

At whatever age it may have been that he came to town, and it is a question of only a few years one way or another, he brought with him a mind well-stored to produce exactly the kind of work that we have from him in the first plays, in the poems, and in many of the Sonnets. He possessed a considerable knowledge of middle-class men and women, gained in his father's home, among his father's friends and relations; a loving, intimate and profound knowledge of country life, country manners, men and women, of the flowers, birds and beasts of the country side, and of field sports; a shrewd knowledge of business ways, their ups and downs; a sense of responsibility as a young husband and father; and an education which had made him familiar with books, the influence of which we can trace, not only in his early, but in all his works, chief among them Ovid, in Latin, and in English, the Bible. In his work, even if we did not know anything of the facts of his life, we should clearly see all the above influences at work. As it is, we are able to turn from the life to the output, and from the output back to the life. It is interesting and instructive



to note the growing powers of his mind as his experience and his knowledge increase; and how his art gains with practice. Independence succeeds to imitativeness as he finds that he can turn out successful and profitable plays and poems.

But through it all we see that, as it is with every artist, the foundation is laid in the early years of childhood. He came to town with a mind ready to catch fire, with a mind well-stocked with material, and found there the necessary stimuli—new places, new faces, new friends, new rivals, new books, new sources of knowledge and observation, and new ambitions.

He had the power, granted to genius only, of digesting, assimilating and then re-modelling, re-creating, his own personal experience, and, also, the knowledge and experience that he gained at second-hand from books and other friends. History, biography, poetry, drama, fiction, he devoured with avidity, as can be proved from a careful reading of his early productions. For the deep study of more serious matter he seems either not to have had any taste, or any time. He found in town a bookish atmosphere; he dedicated his poems to a literature-loving patron; he mixed as a matter of course with poets and play-makers.

The limitations of his knowledge and the consequent limitations of his powers of imagination at this time, are clearly visible. For example, as yet his acquaintance with courts and the houses of the great must have been small: his kings, queens, noblemen and great churchmen are very wooden, lacking in personality; they are mere types, their mouths filled with high-sounding talk and rhetoric: he could not make them anything but mindless, heartless, bloodless—*unhuman*.

An imaginative writer, however fine his gifts, can only give out, in new shapes, what he has taken in. It is only in his later plays that Shakespeare makes his great folk alive, for then he had discovered that they are no more than men and women, with ordinary human hearts.

He gave them then our common human nature, exhibiting them with our ordinary human emotions of sorrow and joy, fears and hates, and so forth.

In "Macbeth," royalty goes by the board, and simple human nature reigns in its place. But even in his later work, he is apt to make his high-placed characters talk beautiful platitudes; splendidly beautiful at times. They appear to be men and women of another but not so interesting world.

But, from the very start, Shakespeare shows how profound and true was his knowledge of the country and all therein contained. His country breeding stood him in good stead.

He was endowed with a mind capable of being fertilised by all that entered it. A mind that could not lie fallow, but just had to bear a harvest. Minds differ greatly in this ability. The many can be sowed with seed, yet remain ever barren. It is precisely like the parable of the sower and his seed.

Both actual experience and reading were powerful fertilisers to the latent powers of his mind. If his environment had been quite other than it was, he might possibly have been mute as a poet, but must have expressed, uttered, himself in some way. None of us are free agents; we inherit our brain power, and—if I may call them so—our brain instincts. Further, we do not choose our early environment, and we cannot avoid the influences brought to bear by our parents and other guides in the days, the all-important days, of infancy and childhood.

So—we have Shakespeare fairly started upon his wonderful career: a man of thirty, who, had he died then, would have left but small mark upon the literature of his age, and who, if not quite forgotten, would have been mourned as one of the many who have not had time and opportunity to fulfil the promise of their early manhood.

## CHAPTER XIII

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### FRIENDSHIPS

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IT would be helpful to our enquiry if we could become intimate with the circle of Shakespeare's close friends, learning what went on amongst them and what were their sayings and doings. We must make the best of the small amount of information at our disposal.

"Venus and Adonis" was dedicated "to the Right Honourable Henrie Wriothesley, Earle of Southampton, and Baron Tichfield." The dedication runs on conventional lines, but, nevertheless, it conveys the fact that Shakespeare had some personal acquaintance with Southampton. To this same peer "Lucrece" also was dedicated, which may be taken that the patron was pleased with the first effort, as well as he might be. This second dedication is worded far more warmly than the first; indeed, there is quite a personal touch in it. It runs thus, somewhat Enphuistic:—

The love I dedicate to your lordship is without end: whereof this pamphlet, without beginning is but a superfluous Moity. The warrant I have of your Honourable disposition, not the worth of my untutored lines, make it assured of acceptance. What I have done is yours, what I have to doe is yours, being part in all I have, devoted yours. Were my worth greater, my duety would show greater, meantime, as it is, it is bound to your Lordship, To whom I wish long life, still lengthened with all happiness.

What was the warrant that he had received of his Lordship's kind disposition is not known, but seemingly he was on kindly terms with his patron. Rowe hands down a tradition, which, even if not true in detail, could scarcely have sprung up without some seed of fact. He says: "There is one instance so singular in the magnificence of this patron of Shakespeare's that if I had not been assured that the story was handed down by Sir William D'Avenant, who was probably very well acquainted with his affairs, I should not have ventured to have inserted: that my Lord Southampton at one time gave him a thousand pounds to enable him to go through with a purchase which he heard he had a mind to. A bounty very great and very rare at any time." The sum named is immense; but the gist of the tale may very likely be true.

Southampton was a typical dandy of those times; a good-looking fellow with a taste for fine dress; vastly rich. He was Shakespeare's junior by over nine years, and succeeded to the title in 1581. He was adept in many manly sports; fond of a gamble; a gallant of parts. He was of literary tastes, and among other of his protégé was John Florio, of whom more anon. There is also evidence that he took a warm interest in the drama. In 1599, he and Lord Rutland are said to have avoided attendance at Court, presumably finding it more amusing to "pass away the time merely in going to plays every day." In 1603, Shakespeare, Burbage and Company performed "*Love's Labour's Lost*" at Southampton House in the Strand. All things seem to point to a close friendship between the player-poet and the peer.

The Rutland above mentioned we also find in touch with Shakespeare and Dick Burbage. The sixth Earl of Rutland was a cultivated man and a patron of poetry and the play. In 1613, he sought the assistance of these two players in the designing of an "impress," a device that was to be part of his outfit for a tournament: a design of some sort with accompanying explanatory verse. At

Belvoir Castle there is the following record in the household book of accounts:—"Item 31 Martij (1613) to Mr. Shakespeare in gold about my Lordes Impress xliiijjs. To Richard Burbadge for paynting and making yt in gold xliiijjs."

Thus we have Southampton, Rutland, Shakespeare and Burbadge in a group; two cultured peers and men of the world, the leading play-maker and distinguished poet, and the foremost player. The son of the country-town trader had come to mix in high company; learning and observing all the time.

To this group we may surely add John Florio, without indulging in wild surmise. It would, in truth, be far more wild to conjecture that these two did not meet. Be this as it may, we must not lose sight of the influence which Florio undoubtedly had upon the poet. Both owed allegiance to a common patron; both were Grooms of the Chamber; both friends of the Earl of Pembroke; both prominent and popular in the world of letters.

Florio's father, Michael Angelo Florio, was pastor of the Italian Protestant church in London. He was a teacher of Italian and the author of a manual for those studying that language. His son John was educated on the Continent, but may also have attended Magdalen College, Oxford. He was not only accomplished as a man of letters, but shone as a dandy, and shared the ambition of John Shakespeare to bear a coat of arms. Florio taught Italian, numbering among his pupils many persons of high station. In 1598, he produced an Italian-English dictionary, entitled the "*Worlde of Wordes*," which he dedicated to Southampton, and in 1603 a most worthy translation of Montaigne's "*Essays*." This latter was used by Shakespeare in the writing of the well-known passage in "*The Tempest*," where Gonzalo sets out the régime which he would like to establish on the island.

Two other courtly friends and patrons of Shakespeare were "the Most Noble and Incomparable Paire of

Brethren, William, earle of Pembroke, &c., Lord Chamberlaine to the King's most Excellent Majesty, and Philip, earle of Montgomery, &c., Gentleman of his Majesties Bedchamber, both Knights of the most Noble Order of the Garter, and our singular good lords," to whom the first Folio edition of the plays of Shakespeare was dedicated, or presented, by Heminge and Condell. In the dedicatory letter they say: "But since your L.L. have beene pleas'd to thinke these trifles" (the plays) "some-thing heretofore, and have prosecuted both them and their authour living, with so much favour, we hope, that . . . you will use the like indulgence towards them, you have done unto their parent." From which it may be concluded that the author as well as his plays had been favourably known to the two peers.

William Herbert, who on his father's decease in 1601 became earl of Pembroke, was born in April, 1580, so he was Shakespeare's junior by some sixteen years. He was known as Lord Herbert until his succession to the earldom. With this good patron of the drama Shakespeare must often have come in contact. For example, in the Autumn of 1603, James, scared away from London by the plague, removed his court to Pembroke's house at Wilton. There the King's players, among whom Shakespeare was numbered, performed on December 2nd.

As a distinguished poet and dramatist, Shakespeare's company would have been sought after by all those who took an interest in literature and the drama, and he *must* have been personally known to those court of officials who would be in charge of the performances given before Elizabeth and James by "The Globe" players.

It is not exactly known if Shakespeare meddled with the rebellion of Essex in 1601, but he and some of his fellows went perilously near to getting into very hot water over it. Essex was appointed Lord Deputy in Ireland in 1599, and made a mess of things over there; Ireland has been the grave of many English reputations. In the chorus preceding Act V. of "King Henry V.,"

Shakespeare indulged in the dangerous practice of prophecy:—

Were now the general of our gracious empress,  
As in good time he may, from Ireland coming,  
Bringing rebellion broached on his sword,  
How many would the peaceful city quit  
To welcome him!

This allusion to Essex was dragged in by the neck.

Essex came back, discredited, to become himself a rebel. Among those who aided and abetted him to their cost was Southampton. As to the part which the players at the Globe played in this sorry historical drama, I cannot do better than quote Sir Sidney Lee, to whom all students of Shakespeare are for ever indebted:—

“On the eve of the projected rising, a few of the rebel leaders, doubtless at Southampton’s suggestion, sought the dramatist’s countenance. They paid 40s, to Augustine Phillips, a leading member of Shakespeare’s company and a close friend of the dramatist, to induce him to revive at the Globe theatre ‘the play of the deposing and killing of King Richard the Second’ (beyond doubt Shakespeare’s play), in the hope that its scenes of the deposition and murder of a king might encourage a popular outbreak. Phillips prudently told the conspirators who bespoke the piece that ‘that play of Kyng Richard’ was ‘so old and so long out of use as that they should have small or no company at it.’ None the less the performance took place on Saturday, February 7, 1600-1, the day preceding the one fixed by Essex for his rising in the streets of London. The Queen, in a later conversation (on August 4, 1601) with William Lambarde, a well-known antiquary, complained rather wildly that ‘this tragedie of Richard II.,’ which she had always viewed with suspicion, was played at the period with seditious intent ‘forty times in open streets and houses.’ At any rate the players appeal failed to provoke the response which the conspirators anticipated. On Sunday, Feb: 8, Essex, with Southampton and others, fully



armed, vainly appealed to the people of London to march on the court. They addressed themselves to deaf ears, and being arrested by the Queen's troops were charged with high treason. At the joint trial of Essex and Southampton, the actor Phillips gave evidence of the circumstances in which the tragedy of 'Richard II.' was revived at the Globe theatre. Both Essex and Southampton were found guilty and sentenced to death. Essex was duly executed on Feb: 25. within the precincts of the Tower of London; but Southampton was reprieved on the ground that his offence was due to his 'Love' of Essex.

"He was imprisoned in the Tower until the Queen's death, more than two years later. No proceedings were taken against the players for their implied support of the traitors, but Shakespeare wisely abstained, for the time, from any public reference to the fate either of Essex or of his patron Southampton."

Among the many literary men of eminence with whom the young Shakespeare was almost certainly on terms of friendship must be counted Christopher Marlowe. Without doubt the work of the elder considerably influenced the early work of the younger playwright. "Richard II.," "Richard III.," and "The Merchant of Venice" owe much to the example set by the writer of "Edward II." and "The Jew of Malta." Shakespeare, as ever, showed his intention to follow in the footsteps of those who had hit the public taste. In "As You Like It" there is an unmistakeable reference to the dead Marlowe. In Act III., Scene 5, Phœbe exclaims:—

Dead Shepherd, now I find thy saw of might  
'Who ever loved that lov'd not at first sight?'

the saw being found in Marlowe's "Hero and Leander." And in "The Merry Wives of Windsor," Act III., Scene 1, Sir Hugh Evans sings snatches from "Come live with me and be my love."

We see, therefore, that from beginning to end of his London career Shakespeare mixed in circles which must



have greatly stimulated the activity of his mind. That he took any interest in the philosophic or religious movements of the time there is not any evidence; rather the contrary. His trend of mind led him to action more than to thought, and his poetry throughout is devoted to expressing the emotions of the heart rather than of the mind. Of course, such characters as Hamlet, Jacques and others will be quoted to the contrary, but none of them give utterance to any but the most conventional thoughts.

Marlowe, Lyly, Ovid, Montaigne and others affected not only his technique as a poet and dramatist, but were also his intellectual and emotional guides. In the matter of love, he was an Elizabethan man and poet through and through, neither behind nor in advance of the views held and expressed by his contemporaries. His lovers are all either sensuous or sensual, sometimes both.

It has been the rule to look upon Shakespeare as an inexplicable phenomenon, as a man almost if not quite miraculous, and on his mind as being of a different kind from those of even his nearest rivals.

His mind did not differ in *kind*, but only in *quality*, from those of average men. Just as the body of a fine athlete differs not in kind, but in quality, from that of a weakling. Others may have had as good a memory, as fine powers of observation as he had, but they were not gifted with splendour of expression equal to his.

He was a sociable fellow, fond of good company, and good company himself. His work shows that his emotions were easily aroused, and he expressed in his verse and prose what he must have also expressed in many ways in his daily life, sympathy with and insight into something near to the whole range of human emotions. He certainly responded to what went on around him with great facility. In his writing he was speedy and not over careful.

Shakespeare was, I think, an *extrovert*, that is to say, a man who does not meditate long on what he should do.

or sit down to plot out the future ; a creature of impulses, following his emotions.

An *extrovert* plunges into whatever he takes up ; so did Shakespeare, judging by the general character of his work, by the testimony of his friends, and by the disposition so very often displayed by the characters in his plays. How often they plunge ! Romeo, Juliet. Rosalind. Hamlet himself. Macbeth. Leontes, Florizel. oh ! a host of them—plunge into their emotional adventures, with scarce any hesitation or consideration. Hamlet was a champion plunger, for all that he talked so much ; plunging this way and that. never looking before he leaped ; hence all his troubles.\*

Another characteristic of the *extrovert* is that expression comes hotfoot after emotion. This is eminently characteristic of Shakespeare the poet. The slightest stimulus stirs his emotional faculty into strenuous working, and then the expression of it pours out in a torrent, often to the detriment of the action of the play and, also, often quite out of keeping with the character into whose mouth the flow of gorgeous poetry is put. Shakespeare was a poet driven by circumstances to express himself in the medium of drama ; he was under the command of, in the power of, his poetic impulse, too often for complete success as a dramatist.

An *extrovert* is not seldom a successful man of business ; this was Shakespeare.

To consider this view as in any degree depreciatory of the genius of Shakespeare would be wrong. It humanises him ; to *dehumanise* him has been the custom only too generally. Let us link him to our hearts as a *man*, with all his full share of human weaknesses and limitations, and with a splendid measure of human greatness.

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\* See further remarks on Hamlet, page 142.

## CHAPTER XIV

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### LONDON LIFE

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THE plays prove that Shakespeare plunged splendidly into all that the life of the metropolis offered him in the way of joy. He was not an anchorite or a sour-visaged looker-on. He was a doer, and, to use an expressive Americanism, a "trier."

From the plays and from our knowledge of his career, we can gather a good idea of what were his haunts in town and the manner of life he lived.

As actor, poet and man of affairs, he frequented the taverns and inns, around which moved so much of the activity of Elizabethan London.

Tradition connects Shakespeare with the Mermaid tavern in Bread Street, Cheapside, which, as the haunt of many literary men, he surely must have frequented.

Thomas Fuller, in his "Worthies of England," gives a famous account of the meetings which he says took place between Shakespeare and Ben Jonson at the Mermaid. But his picture, though doubtless founded upon good, contemporary testimony, can be no more than imaginative in its details. He says: "Many were the wit-combats betwixt him and Ben Johnson, which two I behold like a Spanish great gallion, and an English Man of War; Master Johnson (like the former) was built far higher in Learning; Solid; but slow in his performances. Shakespeare, with the English man-of-war, lesser in bulk,

but lighter in sailing, could turn with all tides, tack about and take advantage of all winds, by the quickness of his Wit and Invention."

Among others with whom Shakespeare may have foregathered there, were Richard Hakluyt, the geographer and historian, Raleigh, and Francis Beaumont, who has some stirring lines on the scenes that took place at this tavern in his poetical Epistle to Ben Jonson:—

What things have we seen  
 Done at the Mermaid! heard words that have been  
 So nimble, and so full of subtle flame,  
 As if that everyone from whence they came  
 Had meant to put his whole wit in a jest,  
 And had resolv'd to live a fool the rest  
 Of all his dull life; and when there hath been thrown  
 Wit able enough to justify the town  
 For three days past; wit that might warrant be  
 For the whole city to talk foolishly  
 Till that were cancell'd; and when that was gone,  
 We left an air behind us, which alone  
 Was able to make the next two companies  
 (Right witty, though but downright fools) more wise.

Ben himself mentions having dined at "Bread-Street's Mermaid," and speaks of

A pure cup of rich canary wine,  
 Which is the Mermaid's now, but shall be mine.

There were gay carryings-on at those taverns, and we know from the evidence of the plays that Shakespeare noted all that went on therein. In "*Henry IV.*," "*The Merry Wives of Windsor*," and elsewhere he shows an intimate knowledge of tavern life, both before and behind the scenes, so to speak.

Another centre of literary life that he must have frequented was Saint Paul's Churchyard and Paternoster Row, where the booksellers did congregate. Could he have kept away from that busy quarter? He would have bought books there: he would have chatted with fellow-

writers and with the booksellers—he was human and a writer of books, and bookmen love “shop” talk.

Is it likely that he did not go into Saint Paul's? Stroll up and down amid the varied throng there to be found, observing the many queer characters there to be seen? Dekker, in the “*Gul's Horn-Booke*,” devotes an entertaining chapter to “How a Gallant should behave himself in Powles walkes.”

His first residence in town was probably near to The Theatre; situated in the parish of Saint Helen's. Bishopsgate, where, after he had moved away therefrom, we find that he had property assessed at £5. It was, and is, an interesting part of the town. Stow records that some small distance from the “parish church of St. Ethelburge, Virgin,” “is a large court called little St: Helen's, because it is pertained to the nuns of St: Helen's, and was their house . . . then, somewhat more west, is another court with a winding lane, which cometh out against the west end of St: Andrew Undershaft church. In this court standeth the church of St: Helen, sometime a priory of black nuns, and in the same a parish church of St: Helen.”

One of the first things that would have impressed the observant poet, on his arriving in London, must have been the remains of the many great religious establishments which had been dissolved in the recent Reformation times and whose buildings were now turned to lay uses as dwellings, almshouses and so forth, many of the churches being devoted to parochial purposes. As he walked the streets of the town, he must have heard echoes of that past which he was to picture in many of his plays. We are apt to forget that Elizabethan London was a mediæval town, and that it was much easier for one in those days than it is for us to come into touch with the times of the Wars of the Roses. As the playgoer sat in the theatre then, he did not need the scenery which *we* must have in order to visualise the past: the past was still around him; the scenery was ever present to his

mind's eye when any part of the action was laid in the streets of London.

In 1606, or thereabouts, Shakespeare may have moved to the less savoury neighbourhood of Southwark, for the purpose of being near his work in The Globe; but I think it very doubtful he did so. But whether he lived there, or did not, he had to go there almost every day of the theatrical season.

Southwark and the Bankside were naturally favourite places of residence with the players. Shakespeare's brother Edmund, a playactor, was a parishioner of Saint Saviour's. Aubrey states that Beaumont and Fletcher lived "on the Bank-side not far from the playhouse"; and Sir Sidney Lee says "in adjacent streets lodged Augustine Phillips, Thomas Pope and other actor associates of Shakespeare."

We learn from Stow that the borough of Southwark "consisteth of divers streets, ways and winding lanes; all full of buildings, inhabited"; that for a half mile above the Bridge was "a continual building of tenements"; there was a broad street leading south from the Bridge, where there were many "fair inns, for receipt of travellers," among them being the Tabard, of Canterbury Pilgrim fame; there was "the late discarded monastery of St: Saviour's" and other religious houses and hospitals; many parish churches; several prisons, including the Marshalsey and the King's Bench of Dickens fame; the town houses of the Bishops of Rochester and Winchester; the bear-gardens, and the theatres.

A strange medley of life, high and low, reputable and disreputable; filled full with the bustle of the past and of the present; a happy hunting-ground for those two students of human nature and lovers of "character," Shakespeare and Dickens.

A second certainly-ascertained dwelling place of Shakespeare for many years was Silver Street, hard by Cheapside, the great shopping centre of Elizabethan London. For having unearthed this fact, as well as

for much other interesting new matter concerning Shakespeare, we are indebted to Professor William Wallace.\*

If we go up Wood Street, on the north side of Cheapside, some little way up on the left hand we may turn into Silver Street, in which on the north, at the corner of Monkwell Street, stands a public-house which is on the site of what was for some time Shakespeare's home. There the poet lived and worked, in close friendship with the family of his host. They were French folk; the father of the family Christopher Mountjoy, a maker of wigs and of other head tire. In 1598, he took into his house, as apprentice, Stephen Bellott, the stepson of one Humphrey Fludd. The lad developed into a skilful workman, a favourite with his master, with Madame Mountjoy, and with their daughter, Mary. When his apprenticeship was completed, Stephen decided that it would be well for him to see something of the world; so set forth for Spain, returning in 1604. Now, Mountjoy declared that he helped with funds for this adventure; Stephen said this was not so.

Shakespeare was at this time resident in the Mountjoy house, and to him Madame appealed for assistance and advice in the love affair of her daughter and Master Stephen. Could and would he approach the young man, and intimate to him that if he married Mary she would not come to him with empty pockets? Shakespeare undertook the task and successfully accomplished it. *Love's Labour was not Lost*: on November 19th, 1604, the marriage took place in Saint Olave's Church, in Silver Street.

For a while the young couple lived in the house of her parents, the agreement seeming to have been that they were to work there for two years and then to be the

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\* As regards Silver Street, see Professor Wallace's article in "Harper's Magazine," March, 1910. The story as I give it here is rewritten from that fascinating essay.

recipients of the considerable sum of £50. So Mountjoy declared; but Stephen said that it had not been so agreed.

So, Mary and Stephen moved away, taking a lodging not far off in an inn kept by George Wilkins, a dramatist of small parts, with whom Shakespeare certainly had some dealing and with whom he possibly collaborated in the writing of "Timon of Athens" and "Pericles."

Madame Mountjoy died in October, 1606, and again the young folk tried to live with the father; again failed, the causes of strife between the elder and the younger man being various, chiefly questions of money. So Bellott at last had recourse to the law to right what he considered his wrongs. For taking this action we must be grateful to him, for otherwise we might never have heard of Shakespeare's sojourn in Silver Street.

The hearing of the cause was set down for the Easter Term of 1612, and "William Shakespeare, gent." was called upon to tell what he knew of the case, he having been, as we have seen, the go-between the parties in the important matter of the marriage settlement. Certain questions were set forth for the witnesses to answer. It is not necessary to follow the details of this family squabble. The main point for us is that we have the signed deposition of "William Shakespeare of Stratford upon Avon in the Countye of Warwick gentleman of the Age of xlviii yeres or thereaboytes." It is noteworthy how we almost always find him described as of Stratford and not of London; his *home* was in the country. In reply to the interrogations, he stated that he had known the Mountjoys for about ten years, and had known Bellott when he was apprenticed. He gave him a good character. He says that the defendant, Mountjoy, "did make a motion" unto the complainant of marriage with Mary, and that the girl's mother had called in his, Shakespeare's, assistance, and so on, as recorded above. George Wilkins was also a witness. The upshot was that on June 30th the case was referred by the court to the French Church in London for decision.



How long exactly Shakespeare lived with the Mountjoys it is difficult to make out; he was with them in 1604, and according to his evidence was with them during Bellott's apprenticeship, from 1598 on; but he seems to say that he had known the family before that. There we leave it.

While residing with the Mountjoys Shakespeare must have written several of the plays, among them "Henry V." Can it be believed that he lived with French folk these many years without becoming conversant with their tongue? Maybe he had the wooing of Mary and Stephen in his mind when he wrote the pretty bit of love-making between Henry of England and Katherine of France.

Despite all his work and his many interests in London, Shakespeare kept close touch with his home in Stratford. Aubrey says, "he was wont to goe to his native countrye once a year." Whether this be literal truth we know not. But it may be taken as certain beyond reasonable doubt that he did often visit his home. What reason could there have been for not doing so?

There are at least two routes which he could have taken between London and Stratford: one by Oxford, through Shipston-on-Stour, Long Compton, Chipping Norton, Woodstock, Oxford, High Wycombe, and Beaconsfield; the other by Banbury, over Edgehill, through Buckingham, Aylesbury, Wendover, Amersham, and the Chalfonts. The roads joined at Uxbridge. There he would probably have turned Eastward, making his way along past Tyburn and so into town. In the early "Love's Labour's Lost" he makes reference to the well-known hanging-place:—

Thou mak'st the triumvirie, the corner-cap of society,  
The shape of Love's Tyburn, that hangs up simplicity.

There are reasons for believing that sometimes, if not always, he travelled by the Oxford route. Aubrey states that at Grendon Underwood, near Oxford, Shakespeare "happened to take the humour of the constable in 'Midsummer Night's Dream,'" which is rather puzzling,

but perhaps the worthy man had got his titles mixed, and was thinking of "Much Ado About Nothing."

It was traditional that he put up at the Crown Inn, in Cornmarket Street, Oxford, not far from Carfax. Of this hostelry, John, the father of Sir William Davenant, was mine host. The inn-keeper was a jolly fellow, a lover of plays and of play-makers; his wife was a pretty, witty woman. So, if Shakespeare did put up there, he would have enjoyed himself thoroughly. But there is no evidence to sustain the legend that he was more than a friend to mine hostess.

We can now resume the exploration of the plays in quest of Shakespeare's self.

## CHAPTER XV

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### MIDDLE PLAYS

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“**A** MIDSUMMER NIGHT’S DREAM” dates probably from somewhere about the end of the year 1594. There are many points to be noted in it that throw a light on the progress of Shakespeare’s mind and art. The plot and its details show how varied had become his reading, which was evidently practical, lying chiefly in the range of romance and poetry. For the purposes of his historical plays we know that he had recourse to Holinshed, Plutarch and other recorders. That he was familiar with Montaigne we also know. If a list were made of the many writers with whom he was at least acquainted, it would show how foolish is the accusation that he was an unlettered bumpkin, and therefore could not have written the plays credited to him.

This play is the work of a country poet and sportsman through and through. He had doubtless in his early days heard many tales of the doings of the fairy folk from the lips of his country relations and friends, and it was like him, and unlike any other poet, to make the little folk thoroughly alive and the wire-pullers of the fates of his mortal puppets.

The Bottom and Company scenes have a twofold interest. The characters are obviously drawn from life,

doubtless highly-coloured portraits of rustic mechanicals whom he had met in and around Stratford; and surely in the behaviour of Bottom and his greediness for the chief part and the centre of the stage there was sly fun being poked at some performers of those days?

This comedy shows an immense advance towards maturity. The intrigue is indeed over-elaborate, and upon the stage at times quite confusing as regards the lovers' adventures; the quartette not only getting badly mixed themselves, but occasionally being the cause of puzzlement to the audience. At any rate, this has been the case in some modern performances, but was doubtless more easily avoided on the wide open stage of the Globe.

The advance is chiefly shown in the growing power which the dramatist has of being himself; the poetry is far less imitative than previously, and bears the hall-mark of Shakespeare in passage after passage.

The atmosphere throughout is one that could have been created by him only, especially in the woodland scenes. In fact, it is the poetry, the fairies and the fooling of Bottom and his comrades that makes the play the delight that it is; and these are all thoroughly Shakespeare.

The country and sporting note is prominent. It is struck in the very first scene, when Lysander is arranging his elopement with Hermia:—

If thou Lovest me then,  
Steel forth thy father's house to-morrow night;  
And in the wood, a league without the town,  
Where I did meet thee once with Helena,  
To do observance to a morn of May,  
There I will stay for thee.

May Day observances must have been a delight to Shakespeare from childhood, and often in later life he would see the lads and lassies trooping out of London town on their happy errand.

Puck's famous speech in Act II., Scene 1, I *feel* must have come from a mind crammed with affectionate memories of days in Arden:—

I am that merry wanderer of the night,  
 I jest to Oberon, and make him smile,  
 When I a fat and bean-fed horse beguile,  
 Neighing in likeness of a silly fool;  
 And sometimes lurk I in a gossip's bowl,  
 In very likeness of a roasted crab;  
 And, when she drinks, against her lips I bob,  
 And on her wither'd dew-lap pour the ale.  
 The wisest aunt, telling the saddest tale,  
 Sometimes for three-foot stool mistaketh me;  
 Then slip I from her bum, down topples she,  
 And 'tailor' cries, and falls into a cough;  
 And then the whole quire hold their hips, and laugh;  
 And waxen in their mirth, and sneeze, and swear,  
 A merrier hour was never wasted there.

There must be bits of reminiscence there. It smacks of actual observation. Shakespeare, doubtless, spent many such a merry hour with his Arden friends, unconsciously laying up treasures for future use. That picture of the old gossip must be a memory, and maybe he had seen some wisest aunt topple off her stool to the great delight of old and young, including the wide-awake Stratford boy.

In "Romeo and Juliet" we have Capulet saying to the Nurse, Act III., Scene 5:—

Peace, you mumbling fool:

Utter your gravity o'er a gossip's bowl.

Which bowl would be filled, probably with a savoury draught called lambswool, ale flavoured with sugar, nutmeg, and with a roasted crab-apple floating in it.

A similar scene is alluded to by Richard II. in Act V., Scene 1, where he says:—

In winter's tedious nights sit by the fire  
 With good old folks, and let them tell thee tales  
 Of woeful ages.

Only a practised huntsman could have written this passage in Act IV., Scene 1:—

*Theseus.* Go, one of you, find out the forester;  
For now our observation is perform'd;  
And since we have the vaward of the day;  
My love shall hear the music of my hounds.  
Uncouple in the western valley; go,  
Despatch, I say, and find the forester.  
We will, fair queen, up to the mountain's top,  
And mark the musical confusion  
Of hounds and echo in conjunction.

*Hippolyta.* I was with Hercules and Cadmus once,  
When in a wood of Crete they bay'd the boar  
With hounds of Sparta: never did I hear  
Such gallant chiding; for, besides the groves,  
The skies, the mountains, every region near,  
Seem'd all one mutual cry: I never heard  
So musical a discord, such sweet thunder.

*Theseus.* My hounds are bred out of the Spartan kind,  
So flew'd, so sanded: and their heads are hung  
With ears that sweep away the morning dew;  
Crook-knee'd, and dew-lapp'd like Thessalian  
bulls;  
Slow in pursuit, but match'd in mouth like bells,  
Each under each. A cry more tunable  
Was never holla'd to nor cheer'd with horn. . .

These speeches are filled with technical hunting terms which would never have occurred to the mind of a poet who did not know from experience the ways of the chase. Such references to hunting in poetry are usually of the most formal kind, and not seldom inaccurate.

"The Tragedie of King Richard the second" shows the influence of Marlowe's work in the same kind. Sir Sidney Lee thinks that it was written in 1593.

The play as a whole shows great advance on the preceding historical works and has some fine poetic speeches. Gaunt's outburst on his death-bed is a strong and effective piece of patriotic declamation, showing how

thoroughly the poet was soaked with the big-England enthusiasm of his time.

In Act V., Scene 2, Bolingbroke refers to his truant son Henry in a passage which must have simmered in Shakespeare's mind, germinating and developing into the well-known episodes in "Henry IV." He says:—

Can no man tell of my unthrifty son? . . .  
 Inquire at London, 'mongst the taverns there,  
 For, there, they say, he daily doth frequent,  
 With unrestrained loose companions,  
 Even such, they say, as stand in narrow lanes  
 And beat our watch and rob our passengers.

Though a trifle rhetorical, the king's speech in Scene 3, Act III., has always seemed to me highly pathetic, and one of the best examples of Shakespeare's ability to put himself in the place of his characters, which is an essential of imaginative writing:—

What must the king do now? Must he submit?  
 The king shall do it: must he be depos'd?  
 The king shall be contented: must he lose  
 The name of king? o' God's name let it go:  
 I'll give my jewels for a set of beads,  
 My gorgeous palace for a hermitage,  
 My gay apparel for an almsman's gown,  
 My figur'd goblets for a dish of wood,  
 My sceptre for a palmer's walking-staff,  
 My subjects for a pair of carved saints,  
 And my large kingdom for a little grave,  
 A little, little grave, an obscure grave;  
 Or I'll be buried in the king's highway,  
 Some way of common trade, where subjects' feet  
 May hourly trample on their sovereign's head.

Is that not exactly what would have passed through the mind of the tired, over-wrought, sentimental king?

I do not know if I am straining a point, but it does seem to me that Shakespeare was inclined to make his holy men somewhat of weaklings, notably Henry VI. and Richard II.

"Romeo and Juliet" was published in 1597, but the date of its composition is uncertain, guesses ranging it between 1591 and 1597. However, it fits in well after "Richard II." and before "King John" as well as anywhere for the purpose of studying Shakespeare's self. It reads like an early play, full of life and boiling over with the joy of love-making.

The sanest general comment upon this play that I have happened on is one by Doctor Dowden, who edited it for *The Arden Shakespeare*: "When his judgment had matured Shakespeare could not have written so very ill as he sometimes does in 'Romeo and Juliet,' but a writer of genius could, at an early age, when inspired by the passion of his theme, have written as admirably as he does, even in the noblest passages of the fifth Act."

The foundation of the play was Arthur Brooke's poem, "*Romeus and Juliet*," which the dramatist followed fairly closely. An admirable example of how the poet's muse caught fire at a mere hint is his development of the character of Mercutio, who makes only the following brief appearance in the original. Juliet at the dance is seated beside Romeus:—

And on the other side there sat one cald Mercutio,  
A courtier that eche where was highly had in pryce;  
For he was courteous of his speche, and pleasant of devise.  
Even as a Lyon would among the lambes be bolde:  
Such was among the bashful maydes, Mercutio to beholde.

We can see, too, how he expanded this mere hint into characteristic speeches. In the poem there is this about the Nurse, who, after her interview with Romeus, returns to her young lady, and then Juliet exclaims:—

But of our marriage say at once, what answer have you brought?  
Nay soft, quoth she, (the nurse that is), I feare your hurt  
by sodain ioye:  
I list not play, quoth Juliet, although thou list to toye.



Compare this with the scene in Act II. between Juliet and the Nurse. The scene is in Capulet's orchard:—

*Juliet.* The clock struck nine when I did send the nurse;  
In half an hour she promised to return.  
Perchance she cannot meet him: that's not so.  
O! she is lame! Love's heralds should be thoughts,  
Which ten times faster glide than the sun's beams,  
Driving back shadows over louring hills:  
Therefore do nimble-pinioned doves draw Love,  
And therefore hath the wind-swift Cupid wings.  
Now is the sun upon the highmost hill  
Of this day's journey, and from nine till twelve  
Is three long hours, yet she is not come.  
Had she affections, and warm youthful blood,  
She'd be as swift in motion as a ball;  
My words would bandy her to my sweet love,  
And his to me:  
But old folks, many feign as they were dead;  
Unwieldy, slow, heavy and pale as lead.—

*Enter Nurse with Peter.*

O God, she comes!—O honey nurse, what news?  
Hast thou met with him? Send thy man away.

*Nurse.* Peter, stay at the gate.

*(Exit Peter.)*

*Juliet.* Now, good sweet nurse,—O Lord, why look'st thou sad?

Though news be sad, yet tell them merrily;  
If good, thou sham'st the music of sweet news  
By playing it to me with so sour a face.

*Nurse.* I am aweary; give me leave awhile:

Fie, how my bones ache! What a jaunt have I had!

*Juliet.* I would thou had'st my bones, and I thy news.

Nay, come, I pray thee, speak; good, good nurse, speak.

*Nurse.* Jesu, what haste? Can you not stay awhile?

Do you not see that I am out of breath?

*Juliet.* How art thou out of breath, when thou hast breath

To say to me that thou art out of breath?

The excuse that thou dost make in this delay

Is longer than the tale thou doest excuse.

Is thy news good, or bad? answer to that;  
 Say either, and I'll stay the circumstance;  
 Let me be satisfied, is't good or bad?

*Nurse.* Well, you have made a simple choice; you know not how to choose a man. Romeo! no, not he; though his face be better than any man's, yet his leg excels all men's; and for a hand, a foot, and a body, though they be not to be talked on, yet they are past compare. He is not the flower of courtesy, but, I'll warrant him, as gentle as a lamb. Go thy ways, wench, serve God. What, have you dined at home?

*Juliet.* No, no; but all this I did know before.

What says he of our marriage? what of that?

*Nurse.* Lord, how my head aches! what a head have I!  
 It beats me as it would fall in twenty pieces.  
 My back o' t'other side,—O, my back, my back!  
 Beshrew your heart for sending me about,  
 To catch my death with jaunting up and down.

*Juliet.* I' faith, I am sorry that thou art not well.

Sweet, sweet, sweet nurse, tell me, what says my love?

*Nurse.* Your love says, like an honest gentleman, and a courteous, and a kind, and a handsome, and, I warrant you, a virtuous,—where is your mother?

*Juliet.* Where is my mother! why, she is within;  
 Where should she be? How oddly thou repliest!  
 "Your love says, like an honest gentleman,  
 Where is your mother?"

*Nurse.* O, God's lady dear!

Are you so hot? marry, come up, I trow;  
 Is this the poultice for my aching bones?  
 Henceforward do your messages yourself.

*Juliet.* Here's such a coil! come, what says Romeo?

*Nurse.* Have you got leave to go to shrift to-day?

*Juliet.* I have.

*Nurse.* Then hie you hence to Friar Laurence's cell. . . .

The nurse *must* have been drawn from some original; she is not a stage old woman. Shakespeare must have known some old dame who provided him with the core of the character.

Here is a bit of tavern life, which reminds one irresistibly of Dekker. In Act III., Scene 1, Mercutio says to Benvolio:—

Thou art like one of those fellows that when he enters the confines of a tavern claps me his sword upon the table and says, 'God send me no need of thee!' and by the operation of the second cup draws it on the drawer, when indeed there is no need.

The keynote to Elizabethan and, therefore, to Shakespearean love is well put in Juliet's upbraiding of Romeo, when she blames nature for having hidden so bad a spirit:—

In mortal paradise of so sweet flesh!

Here is a lovely sunrise:—

Night's candles are burnt out, and jocund day  
Stands tiptoe on the misty mountain top.

(Act III., Scene 5).

In this play, as in so many others, Shakespeare shows that he did not think it worth while to fashion his play-plot in a comely manner: what need was there to retain Romeo's earlier love adventure? Of course, the commentators try to prove that this carelessness of Shakespeare was a merit.

As far as we know, "King John" was not printed until it appeared in the Folio of 1623, but it was probably written in 1594-5. It is not nearly such good stuff as was "Richard II." I imagine that the character of John did not make any appeal to the imagination of the poet, as how should it? Whereas he was interested in Richard.

The play helps little in a study of Shakespeare's self, save the Arthur scenes, which have already been surveyed.

We now come to the first of the really great comedies. In 1600 was published "The most excellent Historie of the Merchant of Venice. With the extreme crueltie of Shylock the Jewe towards the sayd Merchant, in cutting a just pound of his flesh: and the obtaining of Portia by

the choice of three chests. . . . Written by William Shakespeare." 1596 was about the date of composition; Sir Sidney Lee suggests 1594. It does not much matter, but to me it seems in style and maturity to belong to the later date.

The sources of the plot throw further light on Shakespeare's reading. They include: *Il Pecorone*, a collection of tales, by Sir Giovanni Fiorentino, of which at the time there was no published English translation; but there may have been one in MS., or the plot may have been written out for Shakespeare by a friend, perhaps by John Florio. Shakespeare may have been able to read Italian for all we know to the contrary. The casket business may have come from the "*Gesta Romanorum*."

The centre of interest is not the Merchant, but his enemy the Jew. As an indication of the view that would be taken of Shylock by an Elizabethan audience, it is noteworthy that the running headlines to both of the first Quarto editions are the "Comical" history of the "Merchant of Venice." The modern practice of presenting the Jew after the trial as almost a figure of tragedy is indefensible. It may make the scene more seemly to modern spectators; that is not the point, which is: What was the Jew "that Shakespeare drew"? An Elizabethan audience would have howled with rage at being asked to sympathise with any sort of Jew who had tried to play a dirty trick upon a Christian. They roared with delight when he was foiled, and, also, when his daughter robbed him of his ill-gotten gains. Even if Shakespeare had contemplated such an offence as to show sympathy with a Jew, he would have been stayed by his partners and fellow-actors. The explanation of the pathetic words which here and there are put into Shylock's mouth is simply that, when writing, the emotional *poet's* insight and sympathy overcame the practical view which had to be taken of a stock stage character by a practical *dramatist* and *actor*. Shylock throughout the play, and especially in the trial scene, is the execrable and ever-to-be-execrated villain; defeated by his own wicked cunning;

with "wolvish, bloody, starved, and ravenous designs"; for whom a "halter gratis" would provide too easy a death.

The handling of the casket sub-plot is another example of the poet overcoming the dramatic in Shakespeare. For the purposes of the play, all that was required was to show the success of the wooer whom Portia loved. The defeat of the other suitors, however, offered to the *poet* an opportunity which it probably never occurred to him to forego. It was the means, however, of our being given some fine poetry which otherwise would never have been written.

The play, as a whole, is by far the best thing that Shakespeare had yet done in comedy; the tale is quite good enough, the characters are striking and well contrasted, and the verse, for the most part, has that full and dignified sweep characteristic of Shakespeare.

It startles me sometimes, for I like to think I have a fairly keen sense of humour, to find that I am not able to appreciate some of the most famous scenes of comic-relief in Shakespeare's plays, on or off the stage. Dogberry and Verges bore me; so does Launcelot Gobbo in "The Merchant." Is the following really good stuff and am I a duffer because I cannot find it funny?

Certainly my conscience will serve me to run from this Jew my master. The fiend is at my elbow, and tempts me, saying to me, "Gobbo, Launcelot Gobbo, good Launcelot," or "good Gobbo," or "good Launcelot Gobbo, use your legs, take the start, run away."

My conscience says. "No, take heed, honest Launcelot; take heed, honest Gobbo; do not run; scorn running with thy heels." Well, the most courageous fiend bids me pack; "Via!" says the fiend; "for the heavens, rouse up a brave mind," says the fiend, "and run." Well, my conscience, hanging about the neck of my heart, says very wisely to me, "My honest friend Launcelot, being an honest man's son," or rather an honest woman's son; for, indeed, my father did something smack, something growing too, he had

a kind of taste; well, my conscience says, "Launcelot, budge not." "Budge," says the fiend: "Budge not," says my conscience. "Conscience" say I, "you counsel well"; "fiend," say I, "you counsel well": to be ruled by my conscience, I should stay with the Jew my master, who, God bless the mark, is a kind of devil; and, to run away from the Jew, I should be ruled by the fiend, who, saving your reverence, is the devil himself.

Certainly the Jew is the very devil incarnal; and, in my conscience, my conscience is but a kind of hard conscience, to offer to counsel me to stay with the Jew. The fiend gives me the more friendly counsel: I will run, fiend, my heels are at your commandment; I will run.

(M. of V. II., 2).

I can see a certain amount of quaintness in that; a practised low comedian can make it rather funny, so he can a recital of the A B C. At most, it is not bad foolery.

## CHAPTER XVI

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### MATURITY

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SHAKESPEARE "finds himself" entirely in the two parts of "King Henry IV.." for the materials of which he went to Hollinshed, in addition to whose "Chronicle" Shakespeare made use of an existent play on the same subject, "The famous Victories of Henry V." The two parts must be considered as a whole, for in truth they form one long play.

"King Henry IV." shows an amazing advance; in many scenes the poetry is the best Shakespeare; the character drawing is as good as any that he did; it is the mature, full-blooded, full-blown Shakespeare.

It would be splendid if it were possible to trace in detail the working of Shakespeare's mind in the genesis and writing of the character of Falstaff. But we are limited to justifiable surmise. We have seen in an earlier play what may have been the seedling, which slowly germinated. Therein is an inkling of the fun that could be made out of a cowardly knight. What next came along to help the growth of the conception? There is a hint given in the repining of Bolingbroke over the doings of his vagrant son, wasting his time in taverns with ne'er-do-well companions. I cannot but feel that the fatness was suggested either by some actual pot-house haunter whom Shakespeare came across and laughed at, or by the physique of one of the comedians of the company. In some such way the conception of the

character must have developed before he began to write ; then, when it was being put down on paper, detail after detail, touch upon touch, speech upon speech would boil up as the *actor*-dramatist visualised the man he was drawing.

Falstaff is generally \*accepted as Shakespeare's masterpiece in the comic vein. yet the character is not flawlessly drawn. Shakespeare seldom took pains to weld into an harmonious whole the constituents of his plots or characters. On occasion irresistible impulse would arise in the mind of the *actor* to provide the performer with *points*, and then the dramatist was swamped in the actor. At other times the inspiration of the poet would overcome the instincts of the dramatist. When poetry surged up in Shakespeare's mind, it simply *had* to get itself out and on to the paper, whether in its right place or not, whether or not called for by the dramatic situation.

Here is a small point. Thé Prince is talking to Falstaff, who says:—

Indeed, you come near me now, Hal; for we that take purses go by the moon, etc.

This and a later speech indicate, if anything, that it was Falstaff's *habit* to take purses, which is to me a jarring note. Would the prince frequent the society, however amusing it might be, of a professional cut-purse? Falstaff later distinctly says of stealing, "'Tis my vocation," that which he is "called" to do!

There is this further point. His knighthood has nothing to do with, is indeed an excrescence upon, the character of Falstaff, a relic of the original name and conception. We are so used to it that we do not notice it. The completed Falstaff could not have won—never have been such a one as could have won—the honour of knighthood, or have held the position of page in the household of the Duke of Norfolk.

In Scene 2, Act I., Poins speaks to the Prince of the fun that will come from "the incomprehensible lies that



this same fat rogue will tell us." Which was Falstaff? A deliberate liar in order to deceive or in order to *amuse*? Or sometimes the one and sometimes the other? If so astute and witty as he is sometimes shown to be, he cannot have hoped that his wild lies would have been believed. I am not, of course, dissecting the man as if he had ever lived, but I should like to know what Shakespeare meant, or if he was just inconsistent in his drawing of this character as he was in the drawing of others?

How much sense of humour did Falstaff possess? Was it sufficient to have made him *play* the fool? In the Introduction to the Arden edition of this play there are some good words: Falstaff "has neither modesty nor self-respect. All his boasting, so utterly absurd, and never intended to be believed, is but to evoke laughter. He never makes himself ridiculous to any but his friends; he never tells his gross, palpable lies but to his acquaintances, who, he knows, will not for one moment believe them. He seems to love putting himself into a difficult pass for the very joy of extricating himself by the dexterity of his wit." Unless this be the true view of what Shakespeare meant, then, surely, Falstaff is a bundle of unbelievable contradictions, a character only partly "seen" by his creator; a mere stage hotch-potch of comic doings and sayings, with occasional outbursts of wit quite out of keeping with his degrading habits and companions.

At the beginning of the robbery scene, Act II., Scene 2, Falstaff is given a speech which does not seem to be meant to be laughable, but is a touch of realistic anger. I fancy that is how Shakespeare meant it; this and a few other bits of emotion save Falstaff from being *unhuman*, a mere windbag of foolery:—

I am accursed to rob in that thief's company: the rascal hath removed my horse, and tied him I know not where. If I travel but four foot by the squire further afoot, I shall break my wind. Well, I doubt not but to die a fair death for all this, if I 'scape hanging for killing that rogue. I have forsworn his company hourly any time this two and twenty years, and yet I am bewitched with the rogue's com-

pany. If the rascal have not given me medicines to make me love him, I'll be hanged; it could not be else; I have drunk medicines. Poin! Hal! a plague upon you both! Bardolph; Peto! I'll starve ere I'll rob a foot further. An 'twere not as good a deed as drink, to turn true man and to leave these rogues, I am the veriest varlet that ever chewed with a tooth. Eight yards of uneven ground is three score and ten miles afoot with me; and the stony-hearted villains know it well enough; a plague upon it when thieves cannot be true to one another!

It is usually forgotten that in the ensuing scrimmage Falstaff shows himself the best man of *his* company: the rest run away *instantly*; he does linger to put up a bit of a fight.

I rather fancy that he starts the "men in buckram" scene in anger; as far as he knows, he has been badly "let down" by the Prince. He says:—

I call *thee* coward! I'll see thee damned ere I call thee coward: but I would give a thousand pounds I could run as fast as thou canst. You are straight enough in the shoulders, you care not who sees your back: call you that backing of your friends? A plague upon such backing! give me them that will face me.

And I think that the Prince in two previous speeches is meant to show that he is nettled by Falstaff's abuse.

If the scene be taken this way, the fun of what follows is heightened by the contrast; Falstaff will then be seen gradually grasping the situation and turning it into a glorious bit of bombast for the entertainment of his audience. He may make a poor show of fighting with his sword; but when in a tight corner he can fence with his tongue most effectively and can beat even the Prince at vulgar abuse. But I question if he does not at times show too much of a clever *wit* for one whom the Prince can call—or think of calling—"thou clay-brained guts, thou knotty-pated fool," and so forth.

What about this? Falstaff says:—

For though the camomile, the more it is trodden on the faster it grows, yet youth, the more it is wasted the sooner it wears.

Apparently he was an Euphuist! Anyway, the simile seems to me to be rather out of keeping with the general character of the fat knave.

Surely the "play-acting" when the Prince and Falstaff change places should be acted as a piece of solemn burlesque; that is the only way to get all the richness out of it.

The Prince seems to me to be something of a cad, and Falstaff occasionally something of a gentleman. If this be so, has not Shakespeare gone astray? Or has he deliberately muddled his character-drawing for the sake of stage fun?

Again, would the Prince have allowed this drunken and notorious thief to be employed on military service? No; this false touch must be a relic of the original conception of the character of *Sir John Falstaffe*, and should have gone by the board when the character developed. But Shakespeare, in the drawing of many of his characters, took precious little care about consistency.

The claiming by Falstaff to have overcome Percy is a piece of wild burlesque. Are we meant to take it as consciously so on the fat knight's part? If it were not so, then he was an arrant fool as well as knave.

Let us turn to the second part of "King Henry IV."

In an early speech, Act I., Scene 1, Falstaff seems to me to admit that at any rate some of his foolery is conscious:—

Men of all sorts take a pride to gird at me: the brain of this foolish-compounded clay, man is not able to invent anything that tends to laughter, more than I invent or is invented on me: I am not only witty in myself, but the cause that wit is in other men.

What about this scene (Act IV., Scene 3), where, during the fight in Yorkshire, Falstaff meets Coleville?—

*Falstaff.* What is your name, sir? of what condition are you, and of what place, I pray?

*Coleville.* I am a knight, sir; and my name is Coleville of the dale.

*Falstaff.* Well then, Coleville is your name, a knight is your degree, and your place of the dale: Coleville shall still be your name, a traitor your degree, and the dungeon your place, a place deep enough; so shall you be Coleville of the dale.

*Coleville.* Are you not Sir John Falstaff?

*Falstaff.* As good a man as he, sir, who'er I am. Do ye yield, sir, or shall I sweat for you? If I do sweat, they are the drops of thy lovers, and they weep for thy death: therefore rouse up fear and trembling, and do observance to my mercy.

*Coleville.* I think you are Sir John Falstaff, and in that thought yield me.

*Falstaff.* I have a whole school of tongues in this belly of mine, and not a tongue of them all speaks any other word but my name. An I had but a belly of any indifferency, I were simply the most active fellow in Europe; my womb, my womb, my womb undoes me. Here comes our general.

It is difficult to know how to take this. It may just be a bit of buff onery, of which the low comedian must make the most; but if it is in any way meant to be realistic, is it not utterly out of character? A relic of the first conception? When Coleville found out by whom he was opposed, he would *not* have surrendered.

Is not the following speech, in Act IV., Scene 3, too clever for a drink-sodden mountain of debauchery and villainy?

Lancaster has just gone, leaving Falstaff alone:—

I would you had but the wit: 'twere better than your dukedom. Good faith, this same young sober-blooded boy

doth not love me; nor a man cannot make him laugh; but that's no marvel, he drinks no wine.

There's never none of these demure boys come to any proof; for thin drink doth so over-cool their blood, and making many fish-meals, that they fall into a kind of male green-sickness; and then, when they marry, they get wenches. They are generally tools and cowards, which some of us should be too but for inflammation. A good sherris-sack hath a two-fold operation in it. It ascends into the brain; dries me there all the foolish and dull and crudy vapour which environ it; makes it apprehensive, quick, forgetive, full of nimble fiery and delectable shapes; which, deliver'd o'er to the voice, the tongue, which is the birth, becomes excellent wit. The second property of your excellent sherris is, the warming of the blood; which, before cold and settled, left the liver white and pale, which is the badge of pusillanimity and cowardice: but the sherris warms it and makes it course from the inwards to the parts extreme. It illumineth the face, which, as a beacon, gives warning to all the rest of this little kingdom, man, to arm; and then the vital commoners and inland petty spirits muster me all to their captain, the heart, who, great and puffed up with this retinue, doth any need of courage; and this valour comes of sherris. So that skill in the weapon is nothing without a sack, for that it sets it a-work; and learning, a mere hoard of gold kept by a devil till sack commences it and sets it in act and use. Hereof come it that Prince Harry is valiant; for the cold blood he did naturally inherit of his father, he hath, like lean, sterile, and bare land, manured, husbanded, and tilled, with excellent endeavour of drinking good and good store of fertile sherris, that he is become very hot and valiant. If I had a thousand sons, the first human principle I would teach them should be, to forswear thin potations and addict themselves to sack.

But we wouldn't do without it, right or wrong in the mouth of Sir John. It is to my mind Shakespeare who is speaking and letting himself go in a defence of the virtues of sherris sack. It is an amusing point that sack was

not known in England in Falstaff's day. How much did Shakespeare drink of it?

Does not Shakespeare touch the top note of imaginative writing in that speech in "Henry V.," wherein the Hostess narrates the death of Falstaff? It is what she would have said, and it goes home:—

A' made a finer end—and went away as it had been any christom child; a' parted even just between twelve and one, even at the turning o' the tide: for after I saw him fumble with the sheets and play with flowers and smile upon his fingers' ends, I knew there was but one way; for his nose was as sharp as a pen, and a' babbled of green fields.

"How now, Sir John?" quoth I: "what man! be o' good cheer." So a' cried out "God, God, God!" three or four times: now I, to comfort him, bid him a' should not think of God, I hoped there was no need to trouble himself with any such thoughts yet. So a' bade me lay more clothes on his feet: I put my hand into the bed and felt them, and they were as cold as any stone: then I felt to his knees, and so upward, and all was cold as any stone.

Some such talk as this Shakespeare must have often heard from gossips in the country, talking of the parting of a neighbour.

But is Theobald's contribution of "a' babbled" right? The other suggestion of a "a' talked" seems much more likely to be correct. In the Quarto edition of the play it reads: "and talk of flowers."

But whatever flaws there may be, Falstaff is the finest figure of fun in English literature. We must beware, however, of reading more into the part than Shakespeare put there. The puzzle is to know exactly what he meant to put in.

The immortal Boar's Head tavern is not named in the text, or in any edition of the plays previous to that of Theobald in 1733. That the tavern was the resort of the Prince, Falstaff and the others of that lively and amusing crew is merely traditional. Nor is there any

evidence that there was such a place existent in the days of Henry IV.

Of the other characters in these plays, the Prince is not convincing. I do not feel that Shakespeare really "saw" this young man; he is not very much alive except in the Falstaff scenes; elsewhere he is very much the stock stage hero, with plenty of "fat" speeches. Hotspur is far superior; live, very much alive, a living, breathing man of war.

The King is a wonderful picture of mingled disappointment and remorse; a piece of character drawing equal to that far less complex character, the King in "Hamlet."

In Act III., Scene 1, of the Second Part, the King's speech beginning,

How many thousand of my poorest subjects  
Are at this hour asleep. . . .

is a good example of how the poet's muse of fire could be set blazing by a single word; "sleep" was no doubt the stimulus that set Shakespeare aflame. This is one of the many passages in the plays that have no dramatic value, which are, in fact, short poems dropped in because they boiled up in the poet's brain and smothered his instincts as a dramatist. The Queen Mab and Seven Ages speeches are other examples. At the same time, we must remember that the poetic drama is by right permitted to take poets' licence when it chooses. I only want to emphasise that Shakespeare was poet first and dramatist a long way second.

"The Taming of the Shrew" was first printed in the Folio of 1623. In addition to being a charming comedy, it possesses considerable autobiographical interest, as already noted,\* and also provides a means of watching Shakespeare at work adapting a play by another hand. It is based on a quite good comedy, published in 1594,

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\* See page 5



which bore the following title:—"A Pleasant Conceited Historie, called The taming of a Shrew. As it was sundry times acted by the *Right honorable the Earle of Pembroke* his seruants." Shakespeare adds to the plot partly apparently out of his head and partly from other sources, and a reading of "*A Shrew*" followed by a study of "*The Shrew*" is most instructive for the student of Shakespeare's self. It is the difference between milk and cheese.

I have a notion, for which there is not a shred of evidence, that Shakespeare took "*A Shrew*" down with him to Stratford, and there wrote "*The Shrew*," for the latter is replete with country and sporting allusions, and the Induction, as we have seen, smacks of Arden throughout.

Doctor Madden says much to the point concerning the two versions: "Shakespeare's '*Taming of the Shrew*' teems with allusions to sports, to horses and their fifty diseases. These allusions are of two kinds. Some form part of the necessary action of the play. Of these the rudimentary germs may be found in the older play, but without the distinctively Shakespearean characteristics discernable in their ultimate development. Others are casual, self-suggested and independent of the plot. These latter are without exception confined to the work that is undoubtedly Shakespeare's."

The following comparisons are useful. In "*A Shrew*" there is this in the Induction:—

Here break we off our hunting for to-night;  
Couple up the hounds and let us hie us home  
And bid the huntsman see them meated well,  
For they have all deserved it well to-day.

Which is not so very bad, but how much better is this from "*The Shrew*":—

Lord, I charge thee, tender well my hounds:  
Brach Merriman, the poor cur is emboss'd  
And couple Clowder with the deep-mouthed  
brach.



Saw'st thou not, boy, how Silver made it good  
At the hedge-corner, in the coldest fault?  
I would not lose the dog for twenty pound.

*1st Huntsman.* Why, Belman is as good as he, my lord;  
He cried upon it at the merest loss,  
And twice to-day pick'd out the dullest scent:  
Trust me, I take him for the better dog.

*Lord.* Thou art a fool: if Echo were as fleet  
I would esteem him worth a dozen such.  
But sup them well and look unto them all.

This is full of realistic detail, and surely must be reminiscent?

Then Doctor Madden has this:—

In the old play Sly is offered lusty steeds, more swift  
of pace than wing'd Pagasus:

And if your Honour please to hunt the deere  
Your hounds stand ready coupled at the doore,  
Who in running will o'ertake the Row  
And make the long breathde Tygre broken  
winded.

This would never do: who ever heard of coupling hounds  
to be used in coursing, for this is meant by overtaking in  
running? The greyhound in Tudor time had his collar, not  
his couple. And what about hawking? And so Shakespeare,  
with the echo of the bay sounding in his ears, re-wrote, after  
his fashion, the passage thus:—

Dost thou love Hawking? thou hast hawks will  
soar

Above the morning lark; or wilt thou hunt?  
Thy hounds shall make the welkin answer them,  
And fetch shrill echoes from the hollow earth.

*1st Servant.* Say wilt thou course? Thy greyhounds are as  
swift

As breathed stags, ay, fleetier than the roe.

In Scene 2 of The Induction, the following is spoken  
by a servant, which, I think, tends to show that  
Shakespeare knew the minds as well as the manners of

serving-men in the household of an Elizabethan peer. As we know, this class were frequently the sons of quite well-to-do parents and would often have had a grammar school education.

The Second Servant is addressing Sly:—

Dost love the pictures? we will fetch thee  
straight

Adonis painted by a running brook,

And Cytherea all in sedges hid,

Which seem to move and wanton with her  
breath,

Even as the waving sedges play with wind.

*Lord.*

We'll show thee Io as she was a maid

And how she was beguiled and surprised,

As lively painted as the deed was done.

*3rd Servant.*

Or Daphne roaming through a thorny wood,

Scratching her legs that one shall swear she  
bleeds,

And at that sight shall sad Apollo weep. . . .

This reads very much like a description of actual pictures that Shakespeare had seen. Some of the details—the brook and the sedges, for instance—are the poet's, or maybe the painter's whose work he was describing. Or, more probably, the description was written from some painted cloths or arras such as were used in the houses then-a-days. The details referred to are not to be found in Ovid.

Now on to another jolly comedy, which, like the last, seems to contain some autobiographic touches. The title-page of the 1602 Quarto of "The Merry Wives of Windsor" reads: "A most pleasant and excellent Conceited Comedie of Syr John Falstaffe and the Merrie Wives of Windsor. Entermixed with sundrie variable and pleasing humors of Sir Hugh the Welch Knight, Justice Shallow, and his wise cousin M. Slender. With the swaggering vaine of Auncient Pistoll; and Corporal Nym. By William Shakespeare. As it hath bene divers times Acted by the Right Honourable my Lord

Chamberlaines servants. Both before her Majestic and else-where."

Whether, as tradition says, it was to please the Queen, or whether at the suggestion of his partners in the playhouse, or whether it was of his own accord, we must regret that Shakespeare revived Falstaff. The fat fool of "The Merry Wives" is *not* Falstaff, save in name.

This comedy is chiefly interesting because it is a picture of Elizabethan country-town life drawn by Master William Shakespeare. Though the scene is Windsor, no doubt can there be that at the back of the dramatist's mind all the while was Stratford, and, possibly, reminiscences of some small town in the Cotswolds. Probably a composite picture.

All the characters, typical figures of country-town folk, were, of course, based on actual observation, and must have been portraits, composite portraits, of people that Shakespeare had known. It would not have been possible for him to draw them in any other way; that is the way the brain works, re-creating from the stores of memory. Had Shakespeare known absolutely nothing of country-town life, he could not have written this play in such a way as to carry conviction of the truth of its portraiture.

With the Shallow-Lucy squabble it was best to deal elsewhere.\*

Had we not any knowledge of Shakespeare from facts, what light upon his self could we gain from the play? We should feel sure that he was a sportsman, that he knew country-town life thoroughly, that he was familiar with the country-side, that he had been in Gloucestershire; we might hazard a guess that he was a Cotswold man, which would be wrong, but not far wrong; and we could not doubt that he knew pretty well all there was to know about inn life, drinking and the tricks of the trade.

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\* See page 43

"Much Ado About Nothing" shows Shakespeare at his wittiest and at his worst as a writer of comedy. Beatrice and Benedick are joys for ever; but Claudio is a bore, an ass; so, too, I think is Hero's stupid old father, Leonato. Did Shakespeare *mean* him to be a fool? He gives us a good many irascible, foolish fathers. I wonder why? Dogberry and Verges were stock stage caricatures of bumpkin-stupidity, and there is too much of them.

The title-page of the 1600 Quarto edition of "Henry V." runs: "The Chronicle History of Henry the Fift. With his battell fought at Agin Court in France. Together with Auncient Pistoll." The play is a patriotic poet's version of the prose of history. There is practically no dramatic interest; it might be called a patriotic pageant. Henry is not a personality, but an idealisation of a soldier king. The play lives still by reason of its gorgeous poetic embroideries. It should be read, not seen, for battles on the stage are always farcical and unconvincing.

The character which Canterbury draws of the young king in explanation of his sudden conversion is not true to life, but for patriotic play-purposes quite useful. This cannot have happened:—

The King is full of grace and fair regard.

The courses of his youth promis'd it not.  
 The breath no sooner left his father's body,  
 But that his wildness, mortified in him,  
 Seem'd to die too; yea, at that very moment,  
 Consideration like an angel came,  
 And whipp'd the offending Adam out of him,  
 Leaving his body as a paradise,  
 To envelop and contain celestial spirits.  
 Never was such a sudden scholar made;  
 Never came reformation in a flood,  
 With such a heady currence; scouring faults;

Hear him but reason in divinity,  
 And, all-admiring, with an inward wish  
 You would desire the king were made a prelate:

And so on. Then Ely joins in with:—

The strawberry grows underneath the nettle,  
And wholesome berries thrive and ripen best  
Neighbour'd by fruit of baser quality :  
And so the prince obscur'd his contemplation  
Under the veil of wildness ; which, no doubt,  
Grew like the summer grass, fastest by night,  
Unseen, yet crecive in his faculty.

And then Canterbury muddles the whole thing up with this:—

It must be so ; for miracles are ceased ;  
And therefore we must needs admit the means  
How things are perfected.

Even in the characters of kings miracles are not worked.

Canterbury's argument, Act I., Scene 2, in favour of Henry's claim to the throne of France is dull special-pleading, simply a versified version of Holinshed.

The two finest things in the play are the account of Falstaff's death and King Henry's wooing.

The play throws this light only on Shakespeare's self, that, at any rate at the hour of writing it, he was intoxicated with the patriotic fervour of the new England of his day.

"As You Like It" is a direct adaption of Thomas Lodge's romance, "*Rosalynde*," but while the novelist's forest and folk are more or less foreign and quite unreal, Shakespeare's are English and real ; his woodland is the Arden of Warwickshire, and the characters are English noblemen, bourgeois, yokels and so forth. Jacques, Touchstone and Audrey were added by the dramatist.

The women in this comedy are more interesting than the men, with the possible exception of Touchstone ; especially to the seeker after Shakespeare's self. There are only four of them, but each is worthy of attention.

Rosalind is usually held up as a masterpiece of character-drawing, but is not she merely a charmingly poetical portrait of the Shakespeare-type young woman,

without any particular personality or distinctive characteristics? The gracious-beautiful-lady type. There is a whole family of them: Beatrice, Rosalind, Portia, Perdita, Lady Hotspur, Olivia, and others. They have no motive power in them, they just act as Shakespeare wants them to act so that his plot can go on; they all talk the same, not themselves, but just delightful, happy Shakespearese. They are all very charming, in the same way; there is no real differentiation between them. You could take a general speech from the lips of any one of them and transfer it to any other one, and there would be no wrench, no impropriety, no harm done. But we need not grumble that they are all so much of a muchness, because that muchness is so delightful. They are so many repeated joys.

Celia is the usual stage foil that Shakespeare always supplied for his "leading lady"; quite wisely, from the stage point of view. The leading lady must have a confidant to whom she can unburden her heart. Such are Beatrice and Hero.

But Phœbe, and more so Audrey, show how Shakespeare used his country memories, adapting for stage purposes the country lassies he must so often have met.

If proof were otherwise wanting of Shakespeare's passionate love for the country-side, its sights, sounds, inhabitants, "As You Like it" would amply provide it.

The lyrics throughout show Shakespeare in his most happy mood. He is always joyous when working in a country "atmosphere," or, perhaps, it was that, when joyous, he was inspired to write of the country. Whichever way, joy and the country ran together in his mind.

The repentance of the wicked duke, after a chat with "an old religious man," is one of Shakespeare's almost comic stage-conversions. Why *did* he do such things? It almost seems that when he had to wind up a plot, he did not care to take any trouble to do it in ship-shape way.

"Twelfth Night" was first published in the Folio of 1623. Again Shakespeare goes to Italian sources for his plot. He seldom, if ever, contrived his plot. Perhaps he had no facility for making plots and knew his limitations? Or more likely he just followed the example of almost all his fellow-dramatists. On this point, in the Arden edition of the play, Mr. Morton Luce has a comment worth quoting: "Shakespeare usually avoided the trouble—not, of course, of elaborating—but of inventing a story; he preferred to adapt the plot of some existing novel or drama; and rightly, as I think; for a glance at almost any of the great literature of the world will convince us that to originate in the matter of myth or episode or narrative has more often been the frolic of a nation in its youth, or the task of mere ingenuity, and that the higher creative genius has displayed itself by its power of transmuting the crude metal of popular fable or story into the fine gold of drama and epic." But the complaint that lies against Shakespeare is that so often he does not seem to have taken the trouble that he should have done over the details of his adaptation.

I *feel* that, on the whole, "Twelfth Night" is Shakespeare's high-water mark in comedy. The romantic plot and the comic under-plot are well managed, hanging together far better than is the case with some other of the plays; the romance is replete with superb poetry; the fun is full of verve, and more spontaneous and less full of conceits than it often is with Shakespeare, and the comic figures are all alive O! Shakespeare being, *pace* the commentators, a human being, of course there are flaws, typical flaws; the hastily patched up marriages with which the plot is rounded off are very stagey, almost turning the human beings into puppets. But, after all, we must not criticise the world of romance by the dry light of the world of reality.

Here, again, protest must be made against the modern actor's habit of warping Elizabethan conceptions to meet to-day's views and tastes. The balance of the play is upset when the ill-treatment of Malvolio is made



anything more serious than a hilarious piece of practical joking. To us madness has ceased to be a subject for stage funiments; but our view and that of Shakespeare's public are far asunder. The audiences at the Globe would roar with laughter at Malvolio's plight, never a thought of a sigh or a tear entering their minds; a madman was a comic stage figure to them. Even some of the lunacy in *Lear* must have had a funny side to them.

The romantic figures in this comedy are not much more than lay-figures, without any distinct personality; they are interesting only because of the wondrous poetic garb with which the poet has clothed them. Many of his loveliest speeches are in this play.

The "characters" of the piece are the comic group; they also are essentially types, but each is clearly differentiated and individual. Thus, Olivia's steward is the pompous, sour-hearted fool, but he *is* Malvolio; Sir Toby is the boisterous fool, but he *is* Sir Toby; Sir Andrew is the ninny-fool, but he is *himself* too; and the jester has a personality that differentiates him from the other clowns of Shakespeare.

I might here emphasise two of the difficulties that face us when trying to appraise and "get into" Shakespeare's plays:—

i. So much of what we have heard and read about him sticks in the mind that it is very difficult to form an independent judgment.

ii. We have seen many of the plays acted, and the actors and the scenery come between us and Shakespeare, making it very difficult to take the Elizabethan point of view. I suppose average actors cannot help fitting characters to themselves instead of sinking themselves in characters; only actors of genius make us forget *themselves*.

"All's Well That Ends Well" first appeared in the Folio of 1623. Surely Shakespeare was no more contented with this play that we can be, which is not much. There



is in it a strain of forced and vulgar impropriety which is foreign to his work. Helena and all save the Countess are tainted with it, and go out of their way to talk dirt. What put the poet in this nasty mood? Had the play of some rival recently succeeded in pleasing because of its nastiness? The plot itself is not very pleasant.

Yet, as we read the piece, we cannot doubt that Shakespeare wrote it. Had some event of which we have no trace turned him bitter for the time being toward men and women?

In the midst of this queer and unpleasing crew he sets the Countess, one of his most delightful pictures of womanly middle-age. We ought to be able to learn something more about the self of Shakespeare from this play, but it would be dangerous to draw any definite conclusions. At most, we may decide that, like many other poets, he could be very nasty when in the mood for it. The beast in all men will show its claws on occasion.

In Act II., Scene 1, there is an example of what can best, though not nicely, be described as poetic diarrhœa. The King asks how long his cure will take, and Helena, instead of answering a simple question in a simple way, bursts out into this:—

The great'st grace lending grace  
Ere twice the horses of the sun shall bring  
Their fiery torcher his diurnal ring,  
Moist Hesperus hath quenched her sleepy lamp,  
Or four-and-twenty times the pilot's glass  
Hath told the thievish minutes how they pass,  
What is infirm from your sound parts shall fly,  
Health shall live free, and sickness freely die.

That is sheer poetical padding!

I feel that Shakespeare wrote this play with an effort, that the characters did not grip him, that it is uninspired. It is noticeable that the love-of-the-country atmosphere is wanting, and that there is very little "sport." It is Shakespeare in a very unusual mood.

## CHAPTER XVII

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### THE SUMMIT (I)

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OF the plays that Shakespeare based upon Roman history two are quite unlike his usual work, namely, "Julius Cæsar" and "Coriolanus," in that in them he did almost entirely get away from his native "atmosphere." More, far more, than in any of the other plays of which the scenes are laid outside England, he put himself in the place of his characters, those in these two tragedies being thoroughly Roman. "Julius Cæsar" dates from somewhere about 1601, late in which year Shakespeare's father died. How close and affectionate, or otherwise, were the relations between the father and son we do not know, but it *may* be significant that round about this date Shakespeare was engaged upon work of so sombre a character as "Julius Cæsar" and "Hamlet," which latter, indeed, hinges upon the affection of a son for his dead father.

Dowden, in his in many ways excellent Shakspeare primer, says: "Everything is wrought out in the play ("Julius Cæsar") with great care and completeness; it is well planned and well proportioned; there is no tempestuousness of passion, and no artistic mystery. The style is full, but not overburdened with thought or imagery." All of which may be accepted, but I am not quite sure what is meant by "artistic mystery." It seems to me to have been written with more deliberation than most of the other plays, as though Shakespeare was not in

such a hurry as usual, and worked out his theme more carefully than was his wont. It is not, to my mind, one of the best plays for acting purposes, because of the remoteness of the emotional contents from ordinary life. But it has a solemnity, a dignity and a completeness that are very impressive. It exhibits a side of the poet's character as a dramatic artist, and, therefore, as a man, which had not before been displayed, and which is not elsewhere brought to the front in the same degree, except in "Coriolanus." The dramatist is to the front, rather than the poet. The writer was now in his thirty-seventh year, a sobering time of life; his son Hamnet was dead, the two girls were growing up. Taken for all in all, "Julius Cæsar" and "Hamlet" seem to me to show that around 1600 Shakespeare had arrived at maturity as a man. There is nothing that makes a man so fully realise that he is alone and responsible as does the death of his father.

Much has been made of the so-called climax of Cæsar's death comparatively early in the play. All that need be said is that it is unusual that the name-character should disappear so soon. "Julius Cæsar" is not so much a play of character as a sound piece of historical writing. Shakespeare revives the dead, and save for the rhetorical speech of Anthony over Cæsar the hand of the *poet* seldom appears. In this tragedy he set out to draw historical portraits, and, according to his lights—or, rather, the lights of his day—succeeded admirably.

The crowds are neither peculiarly Roman nor British, though they smack now and then of London life. Throughout his plays Shakespeare's treatment of the workers is purely conventional, his views being just such as would be held then by every law-abiding man, only helping us to see his self by being one more proof that on all public matters Shakespeare shared the opinion of the "man in the street."

As an example of how necessary it is to speak his lines aloud or to *say* them to ourselves in order to be sure that *we* scan his verses as *he* scanned them, take this:—

Go *you* down *that* way towards the capitol;  
*This* way I.

The italics being mine.

It was when reading at Oxford some of the mountains of rubbish that have been written about "Hamlet" that the seed was sown in my mind that only lately has grown to a plant; namely, the desire to study Shakespeare and his work with as free a mind as possible; to get away from the demi-god view of him and to see him as a man. In an old note-book on Shakespeare and other Elizabethan matters I find this *re* "Hamlet": "S. inherited a poor, melodramatic plot and clumsy characters; he added much poetry." Not so bad, I think, for an Undergraduate. I even contemplated, I remember, preparing an edition of the play; such is the soaring ambition of innocent youth.

Watching "Hamlet" acted, I have found myself asking, "Why does not the play grip me?" Why am I interested only in how certain speeches are delivered and how certain incidents are handled? I felt that there was something wrong in the play as a play and have only recently been able to answer my question; satisfactorily to myself.

Once, when reading in the Library of the British Museum, the notion occurred to me that perhaps the dead were allotted ghostly Reader's Tickets by deceased Librarians, and it amused me to conjecture what Shakespeare would think if he were to turn to the Catalogue. Surely he would laugh hugely when he found over twenty columns occupied with the titles of copies of the text and of commentaries upon "Hamlet"! But there is a tragic side to this.

"Hamlet," as should all Shakespeare's plays, ought to be judged as an acting play, written for an Elizabethan audience, which revelled in horrors, jeered at madmen, loved ghostly thrills, believing in the appearance on earth of the spirits of the dead, and which delighted in watching fine sword-play.

Being a business man, Shakespeare would choose, or would accept, "Hamlet" for adaptation because it was a popular tale and sure to please. He was always anxious to provide his company with a box-office success. Being more a poet than a playwright, he often muddles his effects.

The story of Hamlet was very familiar to Elizabethan playgoers, and his new tragedy may be taken as equivalent to the adaptation of a well-known novel set before a present-time audience. Sir Sidney Lee dates "Hamlet" 1602, but whatever there is as evidence to the date of production there is none as to how long Shakespeare was engaged in writing the play. Probably he was not long about it; in many ways it seems to be hasty work; this was customary with him, a play being provided because a new one was due or desirable.

The documentary evidence as to date is as follows. The entry at Stationers' Hall is 1602. Actual publication in 1603, in quarto; and this is on the title-page: "The Tragicall Historie of Hamlet Prince of Denmarke. By William Shake-speare. As it hath beene diverse times acted by his Highnesse servants in the Cittie of London: as also in the two Universities of Cambridge and Oxford, and elsewhere." A Second Quarto came forth in 1604, with this additional information on the title-page: "Newly imprinted and enlarged to almost as much againe as it was, according to the true and perfect Coppie." Evidently the First Quarto was not considered a true and perfect text. Two other Quarto editions appeared before the Folio of 1623.

The texts in the First Quarto and the other editions vary amazingly, affording an opportunity too good to be missed by the Conjecturists; they have let themselves "go," and are still at it. But whatever theory is based on *this* evidence can be upset by *that*. Madness lies both ways, and little else. The question of the two first Quartos is an unsolved riddle, and not really of any grave import. What is important is the play as Shakespeare finally left it to us.

Dowden gives this queer mixture of sense and nonsense; he likes to think "of Shakespeare as setting to work with the intention of rehandling the subject of an old play, so as to give it fresh interest on the stage; as following the subject given to him, and as following the instinctive leading of his genius. The traditional Hamlet was distinguished by intellectual subtlety, by riddling speech, by a power of ingeniously baffling his pursuers, and, at the same time, by a love of truth."

But from what we know of Shakespeare's methods, what he really did was no more than this. He took up the old play, and rewrote it; but did not remodel the plot to any great extent. If he did do so, then he must have been an exceedingly poor playwright. But he must not be judged by the standard of modern methods of play-construction, but by those of his times and contemporaries. The Elizabethan playgoer wanted and demanded melodrama decked out with poetics, as far as serious drama was concerned. He did not worry about the careful working out of the plot, or care much for subtlety in the character drawing. So Shakespeare naturally took, or was given, melodramatic plots for the majority of his tragedies, and, as he wrote, his muse of fire would catch alight, blaze up, and poetry would pour out like lava from a volcano. It is only in a few of his tragedies that he makes us feel that the fate of his characters is inevitable; in "Hamlet" and "Lear" he does not achieve this result; and it no use trying to explain away our dissatisfaction by taking the blame on ourselves for limited comprehension, saying that Shakespeare could do no wrong. That is to do a wrong to Shakespeare.

If we strip "Hamlet" of its poetic trappings, what have we left? Crude melodrama, which is quite exciting when it is acted as melodrama, as it was by Sarah Bernhardt.

Consider the plot. Hamlet comes home to find that his mother has married her brother-in-law very shortly after her husband's death. The ghost of Hamlet's father appears and accuses his brother of having murdered him.

Hamlet swears "Revenge!" But then it occurs to him that the ghost may be an evil spirit and a liar, so he puts the King to the test in the play-scene. The King very naturally grows suspicious and unsuccessfully plots Hamlet's death. Then, in the last scene, all the principal characters who are left alive are killed off by poison and the sword. Such a plot is no advance on "Titus Andronicus." The poetry, however, in "Hamlet" is vastly superior, some of it the best that Shakespeare ever wrote, and the characters, with the exception of Hamlet, are drawn with a hand far more skilled, and with matured knowledge of human nature and increased experience of life. The greatness of "Hamlet" lies first in the poetry; second, in the characters of the King and Queen, Polonius, Ophelia and a few of the minor folk.\*

Hamlet's character is a puzzle. Why? For two reasons. It is partly our own fault, because we will absurdly probe Hamlet as if he had actually lived, whereas he is only an imaginary character. It is partly

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\* NOTE.—I have found the following among my notes. "During a recent re-reading of 'Hamlet' I made note of some of the dramatically superfluous passages, which should be 'cut' in order to secure swift action and to retain the purely acting values:—Act I., scene 2, Hamlet's speech about inky cloaks, etc., omit from 'Tis not alone' down to 'This must be so,' Act I., scene 4, Hamlet's *talk* while waiting for the Ghost, from 'So, oft it chances' down to the end of the speech. Act I., scene 5, the Ghost's *talk*, from after 'I am thy father's spirit' down to 'flesh and blood;' a lot more of the Ghost's verbosity should go by the board, such as 'Oh, Hamlet, what a falling off,' down to 'prey on garbage.' The Ghost pretends to be in a hurry, yet talks, talks, talks! Almost all the talk with the players is irrelevant to the action; very interesting but bad play-writing; all the 'rugged Pyrrhus' business should be cut. Act III., scene 1, Ophelia's description of Hamlet, 'The courtiers, soldiers, etc.' stops the action and is of no assistance to the play except the last line and a half of the speech, which are dramatic and pathetic. Act III., scene 2, Hamlet's long talk to long-suffering Horatio. In the play within the play cut the player king's speech from 'Purpose is' down to the end of the speech. Act III., scene 3, cut out Rosencrantz's speech 'The single and peculiar life.' A good deal of Hamlet's profuse talk in the bedroom scene should go; poor woman no wonder the Queen worried about her son's sanity. Act IV., scene 4, 'How all occasions,' this is not in the Folio; perhaps it *was* cut? Act IV., scene 7, cut the King's speech, 'Not that I think' down to 'quick o' the ulcer,' also a good lot of the Queen's account of the death of Ophelia. Personally I should like to see the grave-diggers go wholesale; at any rate all the first part of their chatter should be excised. Act V., scene 2, Hamlet is very wordy in his recounting his voyage. . . The play ends with Hamlet's death; all the Fortinbras affair is doubtless the old play, which Shakespeare did not bother to omit."



Shakespeare's fault, the character being badly drawn, Hamlet, as far as the skeleton is concerned, is an *actor's* part, probably taken unaltered from the old piece. For the rest, he is an outlet for Shakespeare's unconquerable impulse to pour out poetry on the slightest provocation. Hamlet is a poor piece of material too richly embroidered. To make him out to be a wonderful psychological study is absurd. What Dowden said is a fair sample of that kind of thing: "Hamlet's intellectual subtlety sees every side of every question, thinks too precisely on the event, considers all things too curiously, studies anew every conviction, doubts of the past, interrogates the future; . . . Hamlet the subtle is pre-eminently a critic—a critic of art, a critic of character, a critic of society, a critic of life, a critic of himself." All this to explain away the fact that Shakespeare had no clear idea himself of what he meant Hamlet to be.

Again and again Hamlet is made to talk because Shakespeare could not resist the temptation to write poetry. What doubt can there be in such blatant cases as when Hamlet gives the players a lecture (in prose) on the art of acting, referring at length to Elizabethan theatrical events, of which *he*, Hamlet, could not have known anything? It is the same with many of Hamlet's discourses on philosophical matters. What we learn from these poetical and other interludes is not anything of the character of Hamlet, but that Shakespeare was a typical Elizabethan in his views of life and in his criticism of it. It was only as an emotional poet that he soared to heaven's gate. In short, Hamlet *does* what he did in the tale or play that was adapted; he *talks* Shakespeare.

The Ghost is, for the most part, a dreadful bore, because he will babble so much and to so little purpose; a weakness that his son inherited from him! His message to Hamlet could have been conveyed in a dozen or so dramatic lines. But we must not forget that Shakespeare may have been swayed by the desire to give some declamatory actor a chance of distinction. Perhaps himself?



Ophelia is one of the most pathetic of Shakespeare's girls; the poet possessed a wonderful sympathy with, and insight into, the mind of budding womanhood. This kind of knowledge does not come by intuition; nor does any kind of knowledge. He must have gained it by personal experience and observation. Why not at home, at Stratford, with his own daughters?

Hamlet's speech to Ophelia is akin to Sonnet LXX. :—

Be thou as chaste as ice, as pure as snow,  
Thou shalt not escape calumny.

It may just be the poetic treatment of a common thought; it may possibly be a reference to some incident of which he was aware.

Yes; it is the poetry in "Hamlet" that gives the play its fascination. Many of the speeches are like the *arias* that give charm to the old-fashioned operas. One almost expects "To be, or not to be" to win an encore when finely delivered. It is noteworthy that famous performers of Hamlet are remembered not so much for their general reading of the part and their endeavours to make the character true to life as for their famous "solos" and usually too ingenious "business."

As an example of how a word was sufficient to set a light to Shakespeare's muse, making the play-writer succumb to the poet, take this:—

Act I., Scene 2. The Queen says:—

Why seems it so particular with thee?

Off goes Shakespeare, not Hamlet, with "Seems, madam!" etc. Which is a typical way of working with most imaginative poets. Immediately following is the King's long speech, upbraiding Hamlet for mourning unduly for the death of his father. This may, or may not, be a characteristic argument for the King to use; but it feels to me singularly like Shakespeare unburdening himself anent his own father's death.

Act. I., Scene 5. Hamlet, agitated, says to the Ghost:—

Haste me to know't, that I, with wings as swift  
As meditation or the thoughts of love,  
May sweep to my revenge.

Are not these two similes undramatic and mere poetics?

When the Ghost vanishes, Hamlet breaks out into this:—

O all you host of heaven! O earth! what else?  
And shall I couple hell? Od, fie! Hold, hold, my heart;  
And you, my sinews, grow not instant old,  
But bear me stiffly up. Remember thee?  
Ay, thou poor ghost, while memory holds a seat  
In this distracted globe. Remember thee?  
Yea, from the table of my memory  
I'll wipe away all trivial fond records,  
All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past,  
That youth and observation copied there;  
And thy commandment all alone shall live  
Within the book and volume of my brain,  
Unmixed with baser matter; yes, by heaven!  
O most pernicious woman!  
O villain, villain, smiling damned villain!  
My tables,—meet it is I set it down,  
That one may smile, and smile, and be a villain;  
At least I'm sure it may be so in Denmark.—

*(Writing.*

So, uncle, there you are—Now to my word;

It is "Adieu, adieu! remember me."

I have sworn't.

Is that really the kind of thoughts that would have been seething through the brain of a man who had just seen a visitor from the other world and who had been given such astounding news? In fact, I cannot believe that Shakespeare was able to conjure up in his own mind any horror at this wooden ghost, and so could not catch fire and show to us the horror that was in Hamlet's mind, the amazed stupefaction that Hamlet must have felt. The

speech is laboured, and, in places, very stagey. Effective in the mouth of a clever actor, who, indeed, would scarcely need any words to convey the horror of the situation. It is all expression, not emotion. In such terrific moments as this is meant to be, a man is almost speechless, and certainly would neither think nor express himself in the wordy speech just quoted.

Then there follows the "Illo, ho, hoing" business; falconry terms. Scarcely what would have been used by a man shaken to his soul by an appalling apparition. And the "Truepenny," "old mole," and the absurdities of the swearing business. We are told that this is Hamlet's agitation showing itself in buffoonery; but it does not ring to me as either tragic or true. I cannot imagine Æschylus giving us such talk in such a situation.

The "tag" at the close of the scene, "Oh, cursed spite," etc., is just what an *actor* would write who is seeking an effective exit.

In Act II., Scene 2, the *actor*-writer shows again; Polonius has to read a ridiculous set of verses, purporting to have been written by the scholarly prince to his lady-love! This is merely a stage trap to catch a laugh. I suppose the commentators see in it a wonderful piece of psychological insight, and prove that it is meant to show the incipient madness in Hamlet!

Hamlet's talk with the players is very interesting to students of Shakespeare's self, but has not anything to do with the play, stopping the march of events, save only the necessary directions for the production of the trap-play. We have in these speeches Shakespeare's own views and criticisms of contemporary acting, and references to happenings in his theatrical world. Whatever may have been his abilities as a player, he must have been a *thoughtful* actor, knowing what he *should* do.

Are not Hamlet's directions to the players as to how to deliver a speech one of the finest specimens of Elizabethan or any other prose? Curiously, near the end of this speech, Hamlet, that is, Shakespeare, says:

"though in the mean time some necessary question of the play be then to be considered." This applies, or should apply, not only to clowning and gagging, but also and as truly to unnecessary outbursts of poetry. Not that anyone could wish that Shakespeare had been able to restrain himself, but he is the less great for not being able to smother his muse of fire when, as a dramatist, he should have done so.

Later in this scene, Hamlet says of the "mouse-trap" play, "Marry, how? Tropically?" I do not want to pose as a commentator; but may this not be "topically"? I do not remember, though, if topical were used in the modern sense in Elizabethan days.\*

What is the finest speech in the play? Both dramatically and poetically is it not the King's speech, "Oh, my offence is rank"? It is all splendid, but especially these lines:—

. . . . . But, oh, what form of prayer  
Can serve *my* turn? "Forgive me my foul murder?"  
That cannot be, since I am still possess'd  
Of these effects for which I *did* the murder,  
My crown, mine own ambition, and my queen.  
May one be pardon'd and retain the offence?  
In the corrupted currents of the world  
Offence's gilded hand may shove by justice.  
And oft 'tis seen the wicked prize itself  
Buys out the law; but 'tis *not* so *above*;  
*There*, is no shuffling; *there*, the action lies  
In his *true* nature, and we ourselves compell'd  
Even to the teeth and forehead of our faults  
To give in evidence.

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\* But here are some small shot:—

In Act I., Scene I, Horatio speaks of Fortinbras's "unimprov'd mettle"; should not this be "*unproved*"?

In Act II., Scene 2, Hamlet says of the King:—

I'll tent him to the quick; if he but blench. . . .

Surely "tent" does not mean "probe," as Dowden says it does, but is a reference to the tenter hooks used for straining cloth. These are shown, by the way, in Aggas's map of London.

The words italicised are those which should be emphasised by the actor.

Is not the plot of the play well summed up by Fortinbras's lines in the second scene of the last Act?

so shall you hear  
Of carnal, bloody, and unnatural acts,  
Of accidental judgments, casual slaughters,  
Of deaths put on by cunning and forced cause.

Yet we must thank heaven that Shakespeare *was* more of a poet than a dramatist.

## CHAPTER XVIII

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### THE SUMMIT (II)

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FROM "Hamlet" to "Measure for Measure" is indeed a deep drop. This play, as far as is known, did not appear before it was printed in the first Folio in 1623. Dowden dubs it "one of the darkest and most painful comedies of Shakespeare," but speaks with something akin to rapture of the character of the heroine.

Though there were other "sources," Shakespeare's work is based as to its action on a previous play, his chief alteration being that Isabella retains her virtue, which makes the character more seemly, but also less convincing. If the play were not Shakespeare, and did not contain some of his fine poetry, it would have long ago gone to limbo. The prosy Duke, who cannot rule his land, and goes masquerading, is dreadfully uninteresting. The plot throughout is stagey and unconvincing. Surely this play was a pot-boiler; Shakespeare cannot have felt inspired to write it up, he must have been moved by purely commercial exigencies. It is all the more forced coming as it does in company with "Hamlet" and "Othello." But we must not be sure that he did not delight in it, for he also wrote "All's Well" and "Troilus and Cressida." It was a crude, outspoken age, often dirty apparently for mere love of dirt, and Shakespeare was of his own age as well as for all time. The large amount of prose in it seems to indicate that the theme of this play did not appeal to the *poet*.

"Troilus and Cressida," written exactly when we do not know, is another puzzle to the lovers of the poet Shakespeare, being very dull stuff. Perhaps another pot-boiler. It is to me thoroughly un-Shakespearean, almost more so than anything else credited to him. But the editors of the Folio considered that it was his work. If it be so, it helps us to an understanding of the poet's self by showing that, when he was dealing with a theme with which and with personages with whom he could not have had any sympathy, he could be as dull as the worst of his contemporaries.

"Othello" is a horse of another colour. The plot is based upon a story by Cinthio, which Shakespeare may have read in the original Italian, or in an MS. translation. He reshaped the plot in many ways, and his is the credit of developing the dry-bone characters into living beings. Iago is far the most interesting person in the play. In the novel, his motive is that he was "desperately enamoured" of Desdemona. In "Othello," Act I., Scene 1, Iago says that his hate of Othello has arisen from the commander's neglect of the ensign's plea to be made lieutenant. If this were all, then Iago would be a monster, not a man. But in Act II., Scene 1, he gives an additional motive for his actions:—

For that I do suspect the lusty Moor.

Hath leaped into my seat.

It seems that once again the dramatist has not bothered to work out his details.

In Act II., Scene 2, a herald makes an announcement almost immaterial to the conduct of the plot. This is one of many similar redundant small scenes in which Shakespeare indulges.\*

Perhaps the most pathetic touch in the play is when Desdemona, speaking of Othello's anger with her, says:—

Those that do teach young babes

Do it with gentle means and easy tasks :

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\* See same play, Act III., scene 2.

*He might have chid me so; for, in good faith,  
I am a child to chiding.*

Therein is shown the keynote of her tragedy; a child caught in the whirlpool of a relentless, irresistible fate. The tragic upshot is inevitable.

The pathos is almost cruel in the scene between Desdemona and Emilia, Scene 3, Act IV., until, to *my* mind, it is soiled and spoiled by the waiting-women's discussion on cuckoldry, and by Desdemona's last two lines, which are a mere stage "tag":—

Good night, good night: heaven me such usage send,  
Not to pick bad from bad, but by bad mend.

For the seeker after Shakespeare's self, the chief value of "Othello" lies in the masterfulness of the poetry and in the character-drawing of Desdemona and of Iago, the former perhaps his most loveable woman and the latter his most complex villain. The structure of the play shows that Shakespeare had gained by experience; except in "Macbeth" he never put his materials together more skilfully. Simply as a story the play goes with a swing.\*

Next in the trio of grand tragedies comes "King Lear," with its wildly improbable plot and its too often crude character-drawing. It is a chronicle history muddled up with drama and poetry.

"King Lear" was first printed in 1608 in Quarto. The title-page is lengthy but interesting: "Mr. William Shak-spear: His True Chronicle History of the Life and Death of King Lear and His Three Daughters. With

\* In Act I., scene 3, Iago says to Roderigo: "Provide thy money;" should not this read "thee?"

For an Italian lady Desdemona uses strangely British talk when, in Act II., scene 1, she says:—

These are old fond paradoxes to make fools laugh i' the alehouse.

And Iago uses the phrase to "chronicle small beer."



the unfortunate life of Edgar, sonne and heire to the Earle of Gloster, and his sullen and assumed humor of Tom of Bedlam. As it was played before the King's maiestie at Whitehall upon S. Stephan's night in Christmas Hollodayes. By His Maiesties servants playing usually at the Gloabe on the Banckside."

The theme had already been turned to dramatic use and Shakespeare seems to have derived some assistance from the older play. Lear's death is Shakespeare's addition, which, with some of the other incidents, seems to me to mar the sense of inevitableness which is essential to tragedy. In this play Shakespeare piles his horrors to such a height that they lose their sting.

But the chief blot is the silliness of Lear. It is difficult to feel sorry for him. Who in his right senses would act as he did? It is impossible to believe that he would not have seen through his two wicked daughters, and that he would have been so simply turned against the one he dearly loved. It is not till well on in the play that he can be accepted as a tragic figure, and never, to my mind, do his fate and his sufferings wring the heart. The blinding at the end of the play is more horrid than horrible. Here, again, Shakespeare fails badly in the construction of his plot and in the drawing of his characters, while rising to supreme heights as a poet.

In Act I., Scene 4, is a bit of "sport." The Fool says:—

Truth's a dog must to kennel; he must be whipped out when Lady the brach may stand by the fire and stink.

Later on Lear says:—

The little dogs and all,

Tray, Blanch and Sweetheart, see, they bark at me.

Then, Edgar has this:—

. . . . . Avaunt, you curs!

Be thy mouth or black or white,

Mastiff, greyhound, mongrel grim,

Hound or spaniel, brach or lym;

Or bobtail tike or trundle-tail;  
Tom will make them weep and wail:  
For, with throwing thus my head,  
Dogs leap the hatch, and all are fed.

There is a strange contrast between the wonderful character-drawing and well-contrived stories of "Othello" and "Macbeth" and the crudities of "Lear," which might easily have been avoided. Did Shakespeare write the last-named in a hurry and at fever-heat? The first two with more deliberation and thought? I cannot but think that it was so.

To me, "Macbeth" is Shakespeare's high-water mark; it contains some of his finest poetry, his most complete delineations of character, and the plot is about the best conducted of all.

The material is mainly taken from Holinshed's "Chronicle of Scottish History." But the Chronicle supplied the dramatist with bare bones only; the drama, the tragedy, the characters, sprang from the poet's brain. It is a tragedy of souls with a supernatural background to personify fate. Mr. Cunningham sums it up well in his Introduction to The Arden Shakespeare edition: "In this tragedy the supreme dramatic energy is concentrated upon the two great protagonists, who in their sublimity and importance dwarf all the other characters. Both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth have this element of sublimity; and both, in spite of the horrors for which they are responsible, inspire us with awe and even, to some extent, pity. Both have the same passionate ambition, and to that extent they are alike. Both are born to rule, and both are of proud and dominating temper. Their thoughts and aims are habitually of place and power—'solely of sovereign sway and masterdom,' as Lady Macbeth puts it. Their ambition is not divided. They support and love one another, and they suffer together—almost to the end, even when they drift somewhat apart."

The play does not add to but confirms what we know about Shakespeare's self: an emotional poet of the

highest calibre; an actor, for none but an actor would have conceived the dagger scene; a skilful arranger of a plot when he chose to take the trouble, or had the time; and possessed of a deep insight into certain types of men and women. It is noteworthy that most of his heroes and heroines are thoroughly conventional, and would be dull but for the glamour which he has shed around them by his poetry. It is in his creation of figures of great comedy, and even more in his portraitures of villainy, that he stands so high as a painter of character. It may be that the virtuous are much of a muchness, and that villainy in real life is more individual and characteristic. At any rate, Shakespeare's weakness is shared by many other writers of imaginative genius, for examples. Fielding. Dickens and Thackeray.

In Act I., Scene 5, the following has afforded the commentators material for dreary speculation:—

*Lady Macbeth.* The raven himself is hoarse.

That croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan

Under my battlements. Come, you spirits

. . . . .

The last line is said to halt, and must therefore be amended. I don't think it does halt. Shakespeare was an *actor*, and cannot have helped *speaking*, aloud or to himself, his lines *as he wrote them*, and as he meant the performer of the part to speak them. After "battlements" Lady Macbeth must have paused a moment—so must the poet have paused as he wrote; thus setting the rhythm right. Many troublesome lines of Shakespeare are set right by speaking them so as to bring out their *full* dramatic meaning.

Act I., Scene 7. Macbeth's famous soliloquy, beginning:—

If it were done, when 'tis done, etc.

Is this speech quite in keeping with the character of the man? It sounds to me more like the poet himself than Macbeth. The point is, could these thoughts have been in Macbeth's mind?

Act III., Scene 1. Macbeth has some pleasant kennel talk:—

Ay in the catalogue ye go for men;  
 As hounds, and greyhounds, mongrels, spaniels, curs,  
 Shoughs, water-rugs, and demi-wolves, are clept  
 All by the name of dogs: the valu'd file  
 Distinguishes the swift, the slow, the subtle,  
 The housekeeper, the hunter, every one  
 According to the gift which bounteous nature  
 Hath in him clos'd whereby he does receive particular  
 addition, from the bill  
 That writes them all alike. . . . .

"Anthony and Cleopatra" was first printed in the Folio of 1623, and probably dates from 1607-8. The material was chiefly taken from North's Translation of Plutarch, which Shakespeare almost verbally follows in some instances, notably in the description of Cleopatra's barge. A detailed comparison between the prose and the poetry is interesting as showing how the poet transformed his matter.

A PASSAGE FROM NORTH'S "PLUTARCH," 1579:—

Therefore when she was sent unto by divers letters, both from Antonius him selfe, and also from his friendes, she made so light of it, and mocked Antonius so much, that she disdained to set forward otherwise, but to take her barge in the river of Cydnus, the poope whereof was of gold, the sailes of purple, and the owers of silver, which kept stroke in rowing after the sound of the musicke of flutes, howboyes, citherns, violls, and such other instruments as they played upon the barge. And now for the person of her selfe: she was layed under a pavillion of cloth of gold tissue, apparelled and attired like the goddesse Venus, commonly drawen in picture: and hard by her, pretie faire boyes apparelled as painters doe set forth god Cupide, with little fans in their hands, with which they fanned wind upon her. Her ladies and gentlewomen also, the fairest of them were apparelled like the nymphes Nereides (which are the mermaides of the waters) and like the Graces, some steering the helme, others

tending the tackle and ropes of the barge, out of the which there came a wonderfull passing sweete savor of perfumes, that perfumed the wharfes side, pestered with innumerable multitudes of people. Some of them followed the barge all alongest the rivers side : others also ranne out of the citie to see her coming in.

A SPEECH FROM "ANTHONY AND CLEOPATRA," ACT II., Scene 2.

The barge she sat in, like a burnish'd throne,  
 Burn'd on the water : the poop was beaten gold ;  
 Purple the sails, and so perfumed that  
 The winds were love-sick with them ; the oars were silver  
 Which to the tune of flutes kept stroke, and made  
 The water which they beat to follow faster,  
 As amorous of their strokes. For her own person,  
 It beggar'd all description : she did lie  
 In her pavilion—cloth of gold of tissue—  
 O'er-picturing that Venus where we see  
 The fancy outwork nature : on each side her  
 Stood pretty dimpled boys, like smiling Cupids,  
 With diver-colour'd fans, whose wind did seem  
 To glow the delicate cheeks which they did cool,  
 And what they undid did. . . . .  
 Her gentlewomen, like the Nereides,  
 So many mermaids, tended her i' the eyes,  
 And made their bends adornings : at the helm  
 A seeming mermaid steers : the silken tackle  
 Swell with the touches of those flower-soft hands,  
 That yarely frame the office. From the barge  
 A strange invisible perfume hits the sense  
 Of the adjacent wharfs. The city cast  
 Her people out upon her . . . .

As a play this seems to me to be quite unworthy of the mature dramatist : it is difficult to read, for there is little human interest in it : only the occasional flashes of splendour in the poetry raise it above what might have been done with this theme by many of Shakespeare's contemporaries. The character-drawing is purely conventional.

As I re-read "Timon of Athens" the other day, I was amused to find myself thinking that, of course, I could never be ungrateful as were his friends. It is a great temptation to identify oneself with the hero of the piece!

"The Life of Tymon of Athens" was first published in the Folio of 1623, and may be set down as belonging somewhere about 1608. It was based on a well-known story, the details of which Shakespeare could have taken from various sources. Because some of the play is such poor stuff we are assured that Shakespeare worked on it with a collaborator. Here the old demi-god idea pops up once more! Was Shakespeare never tired? Never mentally and bodily out of sorts? Never below par? Did he never have to work when he was not in the mood for it, never have to write up a subject that did not appeal to him? His fellow-actors and friends tell us that the play was his; they knew what they were talking about and were zealous for his fame.

I have never seen this play acted and cannot imagine that it is effective on the stage. But, despite some bald patches and commonplace folk, it reads well, and the character of Timon is, on the whole, effectively drawn, granted that he could have been really so silly as he was in the days of his prosperity.

In Act I., Scene 1, the Poet speaks almost prophetically when we consider the trend of modern psychology:—

Our poesy is as a gum, which oozes  
From whence 'tis nourished: the fire i' the flint  
Shows not till it be struck; our gentle flame  
Provokes itself, and like the current flies  
Each bound it chafes.

"Coriolanus" is a dry play, and there was little in the characters and the incidents to blow up the muse of fire. But it is workmanlike, and the Roman crowd is drawn with insight if without much sympathy.

It was first printed in the Folio of 1623. Plutarch provided the plot, and Sir Sidney Lee makes the following interesting comment: "Shakespeare presented Plutarch's leading-facts in his play with a documentary fidelity which excels any earlier practice. He amplifies some subsidiary details and omits or contracts others. Yet the longest speeches in the play—the Hero's address to the Volscean general, Aufidius, when he offers him his military services, and Volumnia's great appeal to her son to rescue his fellow-countrymen from the perils to which his desertion is exposing them—both transcribe Plutarch's language with small variation for two-thirds of their length."

The play reads to me as if written to order, or, at least, upon a theme which, not making any deep appeal to the *poet* in Shakespeare, did not arouse his emotions. Menenius Agrippa, the shrewd friend of Coriolanus, is the one character that seems to have lived for the dramatist, and is drawn with real insight: for the most part the rest are merely effective stage types.

"Pericles" was issued in Quarto in 1609; the title-page containing this: "The late and much admired play, called Pericles Prince of Tyre. With the true Relation of the whole Historie adventures and fortunes of the said Prince; As also, the no less strange and worthy accidents, in the Birth and Life, of his daughter Mariana. As it hath been divers and sundry times acted by his Majesties Servants, at the Globe on the Banck-side, By William Shakespeare." In neither the first nor the second Folio was this play included. It is in those of 1664 and 1685.

There may be something in the surmise that Shakespeare collaborated on this play with George Wilkins, who, in 1608, published a novel with the title: "The Painefull Adventures of Pericles Prince of Tyre. Being the true History of the play Pericles, as it was lately presented," etc. Wilkins was neighbour and friend to Shakespeare's hosts when he was lodging in Silver Street.



But the quarrel as to whether Shakespeare wrote all or only part of the play does not count for much. The play, in parts, is very poor stuff, and sometimes unsavoury, but this does not prove that it was not his. However, the play is certainly a puzzle, the choruses being very unlike his writing, both in kind and in quality. I am inclined to believe that it was *altogether* the work of some other hand. But again it comes to this—we do not know.

"Cymbeline" is a romance, of which the central figure is Imogen, one of Shakespeare's most delightful young women, with a husband who is too easily duped into believing her to be unfaithful by Iachimo, who is a second-rate Iago. But, as usual with his romances, it is the poetry that wins the day. Cloten, a very unpleasant bumpkin, not very firmly drawn. Sometimes he talks as so boorish a fellow could not have done. This, for example, is much too *thoughtful* for him. In Act II., Scene 3, when he is trying to gain access to Imogen, he says:—

I know her women are about her : what  
If I do line one of their hands? 'Tis gold  
Which buys admittance ; oft it doth ; yea, and makes  
Diana's rangers false themselves, yield up  
Their deer to the stand o' the stealer ; and 'tis gold  
Which makes the true man kill'd and saves the thief,  
Nay, sometimes hangs both thief and true man : what  
Can it not do and undo?

And later on, this, spoken to Imogen, is not Cloten:—

You sin against  
Obedience, which you owe your father ; for  
The contract which you pretend with that base wretch—  
One bred of alms and foster'd with cold dishes,  
With scraps o' the court—it is no contract none :  
And though it be allow'd in meaner partie. —  
Yet who than he more mean?—to knit their souls,  
On whom there is no more dependency  
But brats and beggary, in self-figured knot ;  
Yet you are curb'd from that enlargement by



The consequence o' the crown, and must not foil  
The precious note of it with a base slave,  
A hilding for a livery, a squire's cloth,  
A pantler, not so eminent.

The most of this is far above Cloten.

All the battle business at the end of the play is terribly conventional, and, as so often, Shakespeare scrambles up the end of his plot in very unworkmanlike fashion. Was he tired? Or had the interest of the piece vanished for him when the country scenes came to an end? No *born* play-writer would have wound up in such skimble-skamble style. The preposterous vision of Posthumus in prison surely *must* be an interpolation by another hand. Shakespeare could not have written this rubbish. In short, the last Act is bad.

By some "The Tempest" is held to be Shakespeare's last work, and, evidently knowing that he was to write no more, he is said to have summed up in it all his philosophy of life! What a way to make a play! Dowden gives us this: "The persons of the play, while remaining real and living, are conceived in a more abstract way, more as types than those in any other work of Shakespeare. Prospero is the highest wisdom and moral attainment; Gonzalo is humorous common sense incarnated; all that is meanest and most despicable appears in the wretched conspirators; Miranda, whose name seems to suggest wonder, is almost an elemental being, framed in the purest and simplest type of womanhood, yet made substantial by contrast with Ariel, who is an unbodied joy, too much a creature of light and air to know human affection or sorrow; Caliban—the name formed from cannibal (?)—stands at the other extreme, with all the elements in him—appetites, intellect, even imagination—out of which man emerges into early civilisation, but with a moral nature that is still gross and malignant. Over all presides Prospero like a providence." All of which does, indeed, "suggest wonder"! It is a pity that so delightful a man, and one who was so true a

lover of literature, could write so. But the *bacillus commentatorius* destroys all sense of humour.

Can anyone really believe that Shakespeare, aged about forty-seven, actor-manager, practical writer of plays and fiery poet, deliberately tried to pour all the above into his dramatic bottle? No; he wrote, as he always tried to write, a play to please a public which loved romantics and a fairy tale; being a poet with a muse of fire—not a philosopher, thank goodness!—he wrote “The Tempest”; wrote it as he did write it because inspiration compelled him to write it just so: a romantic, adventurous entertainment. It is an enchanting romance full of enchantments. Let us leave it at that; where *he* left it.

“A Winter’s Tale,” which first appeared in the 1623 Folio, dates from round about 1611. It is founded upon a novel by Robert Greene, “Pandosto: the Triumph of Time,” which was first published in 1588, and re-issued under a new title in 1607. It was Greene, not Shakespeare, who gave a seacoast to Bohemia. But that Shakespeare did not know better is quite enough proof for a commentator that he was a Puritan and not a Bohemian!

A blot on this in many ways so delightful play is the silly jealousy of Leontes, who, like others of Shakespeare’s lovers and husbands, is ready without any real cause to suspect the worthiness of the woman he should know so well as to be unable to think evil of her. But in the novel the dramatist found a ready-made tale and did not bother about the characterisation of some of the main personages, with the splendid exceptions of Perdita, Autolycus and all the country folk, who are English to the core and never saw Bohemia. The play is lovely and loved by reason of the country scenes in Act IV., which are an idealised representation of country life in Arden.

Poor old Antigonus is got rid of in a quite comic way, and the Elizabethan audiences must have roared with laughter when the old fellow was chased by the bear.

There are many things in Shakespeare that are funny to us that were serious to his audiences, and the other way round.

Yet again, in the last Act, Shakespeare huddles up the action, and the talk between Autolycus and "a Gentleman" is as bad a piece of stagecraft as can be imagined. I suppose nobody ever told Shakespeare that it might improve his work if he did take a little care about these matters? And, after all, he was no worse than most of his contemporaries. The marriage, too, of Paulina to Camillo is sheer bathos, and quite uncalled for.

But never mind all this; there is Act IV., for which we can forgive even worse stuff than is the rest of the play. And there is Shakespeare's best picture of childhood, Mamillius.

What light does this play shed on the self of Shakespeare? I think that it shows that his long years of strife and struggle in London, his mixing with the actor-bohemian life of the town, and the passage of time, had not in the slightest degree soured his love of the country and his affectionate regard for the home at Stratford. The country scenes in "A Winter's Tale" are the quintessence of the spirit of English country folk and country ways.\*

"Henry VIII." was first published in the Folio of 1623. It has given rise to a sea of controversy as to

\* Here is a small suggestion. In Act II., Scene 3, Leontes says:—

I am a feather for each wind that blows.

May not the compositor have transposed the first two words, and should not the line read:—

Am I a feather for each wind that blows?

In Act IV., Scene 4, is a bit of Ovid:

O Proserpina,

For the flowers now, that frightened thou let'st fall

From Dis's wagon;

Shakespeare we know was familiar with Ovid; but had Perdita been to a Bohemian grammar school?

whether Shakespeare wrote it all, or a part only. The editors of the first Folio tell us it was Shakespeare's play, and I see no ground for disbelieving them. In parts it is the poet at his best; in no part at his worst. Sir Sidney Lee says: "No reader with an ear for metre can fail to detect in the piece two rhythms, an inferior and a superior rhythm. Two different pens were clearly at work." But why not Shakespeare in two or more different moods? Every student of literature—or of any of the arts—knows how vast are the differences between the work of the same mind in different moods; so great sometimes is this difference that it is difficult to realise that the good and the bad output comes from the same hand.

By the way, this play is "Henry VIII.," and not "Wolsey," as the actors try to make it.

I do not think the play adds anything to our knowledge of Shakespeare's self.

## CHAPTER XIX

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### HIS ART

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SHAKESPEARE is generally accepted, not only as a supreme poet, but also as a supreme master of stagecraft. There are few who would question the first part of the verdict; but the second part is questionable. Lamb seems to have found out that Shakespeare was by no means in the first flight as a dramatist, for he says: "I cannot help being of opinion that the plays of Shakespeare are less calculated for performance on a stage than those of any other dramatist whatever." In the main that is true.

Shakespeare seldom rose above mediocrity in the ordering of his plots, and again and again was weak in the drawing of character. He was not a born dramatist, but was made such by circumstances. In his day it was impossible for a poet to make a decent living by his pen, and the theatre offered the one opportunity of which an ambitious author could avail himself. Even there, for the most successful, the remuneration was not large; Shakespeare made his fortune as part proprietor of a flourishing company of players.

He was compelled to work for his living. To do this, not only was he driven into the theatre, but was bound, if he desired to avoid failure, to write "in the fashion." He must provide that for which there was a demand, whether or not it were in accord with his own tastes. In most of his plays we can see that the dramatic

form did not concern him greatly, what he grasped being the outlet for his muse of fire. Of necessity, he had to suit his work to the stage conditions of his day and to the actors for whom he regularly wrote.

Halliwell-Phillips puts it squarely: "It should be remembered that his dramas were not written for posterity, but as a matter of business, never for his own speculation, but always for that of the managers of his own day, the choice of subject being occasionally dictated by them or by the patrons of the stage." The last statement is not, as far as I know, based upon definite evidence, but it is at least strongly probable. At any rate, the managers, for and with whom he worked, would refuse to produce any play which they believed would run up against the public taste. It would be very interesting to know how often he had to write on a subject given to him. The mystery of some of the very bad plays he wrote might be solved by the fact that the plot was not his own choice and did not even appeal to him.

The technique of play-writing is the overcoming of the difficulties of theatrical representation and the presenting of a story on the stage in such manner that it will go "home," or carry over the footlights, as we should say to-day, when it is acted.

The difficulties that faced the Elizabethan play-writer were far fewer and far less hampering than those which have to be overcome by the playwright of to-day. Shakespeare was not bothered by scenery, he could dance his characters from one place to another as often as he liked. In his day, too, a play was acted straight off the reel, without any intervals, so that it was much easier to hold the interest and attention of the audience, and "curtains" at the end of each act were not demanded. Indeed, most likely in performance the play was not divided into acts, but only into scenes. In short, a study of the Elizabethan drama leads one to the conclusion that the play-writers of those days did not bother themselves at all about what we call stage technique; they did not

even have a name for it! They had thrown overboard, for the most part, the unities of time, place and plot with which the Greek dramatists had shackled themselves.

A play then was simply a story told in dialogue and *acted*, being divided into scenes instead of into chapters. So slipshod were the writers that, when there were two plots, as was so often the case, little care was taken to amalgamate them. In Shakespeare, notorious examples of this are found in "Much Ado About Nothing," "Lear," and "A Winter's Tale." I believe that it was only when the characters of the play very strongly appealed to him, as in "Macbeth," "Othello," and "Romeo and Juliet," that Shakespeare troubled himself at all about the construction of his plots. Even in such cases that the story goes with a swing may be accident, the writer being so keenly interested in his main people that he could not turn aside to minor matters.

Shakespeare's work is rather that of a poet writing for the stage than that of a dramatist who usually preferred to write verse as the most effective medium for expressing the emotions and the atmosphere of his plots. He tells his tales either in prose or verse as the mood was on him, the mood being inspired by the emotional adventures of his characters. It is not the development of the plot that interests him, or us.

The factor common in all living plays and fiction is the presentation of human and strongly-marked personalities, that is to say, characters. The writer of plays who does not create and successfully depict characters builds castles of sand that are quickly swept into oblivion by the tides of time.

Art is the expression of emotion in such manner that it is shared by others as well as the artist. Emotion, to be made infectious in drama, must be expressed by the actions and words of the characters, and unless these be alive the emotions are no more than echoes of reality.

The emotions of the human heart, or soul, or whatever name be given it, are felt by all men and



women, in varying degrees of intensity. It is in the intensity with which they are felt and the manner in which they are expressed, in action and word, that lies what we mean by "character." Studied from the point of view of the imaginative writer, the majority of men and women are upon a dead level of emotional inexperience, and, therefore, do not afford material for drama. Personalities are few and far between in real life. At the base of all "characters," beneath the personality, is our common human nature. In drama there must be strongly-marked individuality, and in its proper place eccentricity of thought, action and speech. Mere types of vice or of virtue cannot be endowed with life, and do not appeal to our emotions, however interesting they may be to our intelligence; even Shakespeare could not endow them with life, he could only wrap them up in a smother of gorgeous poetry.

Shakespeare's plays are alive because they are filled with live beings. Turn to some others of the most famous plays of the same epoch, tragedies and comedies that have strutted their hour upon the boards, but which died long ago as acting plays. Therein is found much admirable literature but a conspicuous lack of living characters. It is easy to summon off-hand dozens of Shakespeare's characters, but, with the possible exceptions of Faustus and the Duchess of Malfi, it is difficult to recall on the spur of the moment even the names of the characters in the plays of, say, Marlowe, Ben Jonson, Webster, Tourneur, Beaumont and Fletcher. Their characters are shadows, skeletons, types, puppets labelled hero, heroine, villain, king, prince, pauper—stock folk all, stage dolls, not human beings. They felt not any emotions, they arouse none. Outside Shakespeare there is scarcely a contemporary play that has made a lasting stage appeal, though many of them are still readable because of their poetry, or because of the light they shed upon contemporary manners and customs.

With all his faults of execution in character-drawing, Shakespeare was, when he felt that way, a master of



characterisation, and possessed that fecundity which is allotted to genius only; his nearest competitors in English literature being Dickens, Fielding, Defoe, Scott, Miss Austen and Thackeray. It is interesting to trace the growth of this gift. In the early comedies and tragedies the characters are shadowy, as are those drawn by his contemporaries. But he quickly acquired skill. To the end he was careless at times over details, the muse of fire sweeping away the discretion of the portrait painter. But he has given us an amazing number of living personalities, some of whom stand upon the topmost peaks of tragedy and comedy. As a rule, he succeeded in turning into living personalities the marionettes of the plays, tales and histories he adapted.

Characters do not leap out of an empty mind, but out of a full memory. They are not conscious combinations, but unconscious reconstructions from knowledge and experience of men and women; they are not bricks made without clay and straw. Shakespeare would select from his "original" the general idea of a character; he would add a touch here, a touch there; characteristics of emotional expression in word and action, until, unconsciously, the whole character shaped itself under his pen. The materials were unconsciously drawn from the stores of memory; genius does not fashion its creations consciously. As Doctor Brown points out, in "The Philosophy of Mind," "in making new combinations of old material imagination is not guided by the will; *if we could direct the course of a conception by our will, the conception must already exist in our consciousness.*"

We know fairly fully *how* genius works, but we do not yet know what it is that enables one mind to execute great and another only mediocre imaginative work. We do not yet know what is the driving-power of the mind any more than we know what is life. But we are not so ignorant as we used to be, for we realise the limitations of our knowledge.

There can be no doubt that Shakespeare was a rapid writer. His work frequently shows signs of haste, even

of careless hurry. We have first-hand evidence on this point. Heminge and Condell, who, we should always remember, were his intimates, say: "His mind and hand went together; and what he thought, he uttered with that easiness that we have scarce received from him a blot in his papers." This testimony is clinched by Ben Jonson, who says in his "Timber," LXIV.: "I remember the players have often mentioned it as an honour to Shakespeare, that in his writing (whatsoever he penned) he never blotted out a line. My answer hath been, 'Would he had blotted out a thousand,' which they thought was a malevolent speech. I had not told posterity this but for their ignorance who chose that circumstance to commend their friend by wherein he most faulted; and to justify mine own candour, for I loved the man, and do honour his memory on this side idolatry as much as any. He was, indeed, honest, of an open and free nature; had an excellent phantasy, brave notions, and gentle expressions, wherein he flowed with that facility that sometimes it was necessary he should be stopped." A just criticism, creditable alike to critic and criticised.

But had Shakespeare blotted a thousand of his lines we might have lost of his best.

His facility, his lack of restraint, account for all his failings as a dramatist and for much of his greatness as a poet. Doctor Johnson said: "Shakespeare never has six lines together without a fault. Perhaps you may find seven: but this does not refute my general assertion."

We can forgive genius its faults.

## CHAPTER XX

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### RETIREMENT

---

WHATEVER may have been his circumstances when he came to London, Shakespeare seems to have established himself quickly, and from, at latest, 1597 onward was a successful man of letters and of business. A very busy man in town; buying property; building a home; dealing in various goods; and also taking a keen interest and part in local politics at Stratford-on-Avon.

On August 11th, 1596, he was most probably at home on the occasion of the funeral of his only son. This loss must have grieved him, not only as a father, but also as being ambitious to found a family in his native town. Susanna was now thirteen years of age and Judith in her twelfth year.

In May of 1597 he purchased the second largest dwelling place in Stratford, namely New Place, with gardens and barns attached, paying for it the then large price of £60. The house seems to have been in an uninhabitable condition, but was restored by the new owner. He had secured a comely *home*. How much of his time he was able to spend there we do not know, but, according to Aubrey, it was his habit to visit Stratford at least once a year, and I believe that what time he could spare from his affairs in town he devoted to his wife and children, friends and relatives there.

He maintained a close friendship with many Stratfordians. Among these may be remembered Thomas Combe, a well-to-do resident, who purchased as his home the fine old mansion known as the College House. With Thomas's two sons, William and Thomas, and with his brother John, Shakespeare was intimate, the last-named bequeathing him five pounds. The two sons took a big hand with Shakespeare in local doings, which are noteworthy only as showing Shakespeare's standing and the esteem in which he was held as a business man.

His daughters made what we should call good matches. On June 5th, 1607, Susanna, aged twenty-four, married Doctor John Hall, a well-known physician, who took up his residence at Hall's Croft, near by New Place. In the following February Shakespeare became a grandfather by the birth of a daughter to the Halls. Shortly before the death of her father, Judith, aged thirty-two, married Thomas Quiney, son of a very old friend.

So, what with friends and relations, Shakespeare's home circle was large, and there can be no doubt that he was popular with old and young.

In 1601, as already noted, his father died.

In 1608, his mother died.

Sir Sidney Lee devotes a very interesting chapter in his "A Life of William Shakespeare" to "Shakespeare's Financial Resources." The details there given are instructive, but throw no light upon the poet's personality save that they prove him to have been a keen, shrewd man of affairs. He earned money as actor, theatrical manager, and dramatist, investing his savings wisely in property of one kind and another in Stratford and London. The conclusion that Sir Sidney Lee comes to is: "Shakespeare during fourteen or fifteen years of the later period of his life, must have been earning at the theatre a sum well exceeding 700*l.* a year in money of the time." In addition, there was the income produced by his investments and by the property he inherited from his

father, though the latter did not bring in very much. In the old Henley Street home his mother lived till her death, and afterward her married daughter, Joan Hart.

Of the many allusions made by contemporaries to Shakespeare, the majority have bearing on his literary repute. Francis Meres (1598) speaks of "mellifluous and honey-tongued Shakespeare," and of his "fine filed phrase"; Richard Barnfield (1598) wrote: "Shakespeare thou, whose hony-flowing Vaine"; in the dedication to Webster's "White Divil" (1612) there is reference to "the right happy and copious industry of master Shakespear"; and there are many others tending to show that the poet was counted as an Elizabethan Ovid as well as a maker of tragedy and comedy.

The few personal touches are even more interesting. Aubrey tells us that Shakespeare was reckoned "very good company, and of a very readie and pleasant smooth witt"; Anthony Scoloker (1604) speaks of "Friendly Shakespeare"; Henry Chettle (1592) is most probably referring to Shakespeare when he uses the term "civill" demeanour and speaks of "uprightness of dealing"; in the "Returne from Pernassus" (Part I.), 1600, more than one mention is made of "Swete Mr. Shakespeare"; Ben Jonson, a candid critic but not, I think, a jealous rival, says that he was "honest and of an open free nature." In the varied prefatory matter to the First Folio, 1623, his comrades, Heminge and Condell, speak of the dead poet as "so worthy a friend and fellow"; and in his noble panegyric Jonson writes: "My gentle Shakespeare." So that we are justified in thinking of him as a man of bright wit and sunny temperament, of gentle manners and fond of good company.

To his personal appearance we have the following clues. Aubrey records that he "was a handsome and well shap't man"; and from the (restored) monument at Stratford we learn that his eyes were hazel and his hair auburn, the head somewhat square with high, steep forehead.

Tradition, unsupported by any definite evidence, has it that Shakespeare left London in 1611 to make his regular home at Stratford. Nicholas Rowe, in 1709, says that the latter part of Shakespeare's life was spent "as all men of good sense will wish their's may be, in ease, retirement, and the conversation of his friends," and the Reverend John Ward, vicar of Stratford-on-Avon, 1662-1668, notes in his diary that the dramatist "frequented the plays all his younger times, but in his elder days lived at Stratford."

Why should Shakespeare retire from active work at the early age of about fifty? Did he leave the town as soon as his means permitted, in order to fulfil his ambition of occupying a prominent place in his native town? Or was he weary? Or ill? We do not know.

His had been a busy life: actor, actor-manager, man of business, poet and dramatist, writing in the course of some twenty-five years thirty-six full-fledged plays, as well as other work. So there is some reason for suspecting that he drove his brain over hard. His was work that lays a very heavy strain upon the emotional system. Can something such as this have happened? He just felt that he must rest. That may well have been the case, or he may have hated the town and loved the country, where were his wife and children. We do not know.

## CHAPTER XXI

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### THE END

---

**I**N 1616, Shakespeare instructed Francis Collins, a solicitor of Warwick, who had many connections with Stratford, to draw up his will. The document was ready towards the end of January, but was not signed until March 25th, about a month before the poet's decease.

What was the cause of death we do not know, and can believe or disbelieve, as we choose, Ward's assertion that, in the Spring of 1616, Shakespeare was visited by Ben Jonson and Michael Drayton; that the meeting was a merry one, and that Shakespeare "itt seems drank hard, for he died of a feavour then contracted." That he did die of a "feavour" is not improbable, as there was much sickness and plague this year at Stratford. On April 25th he was buried in the chancel of the parish church.

Shakespeare's will is interesting. He bequeaths £150 to Judith, a by no means poor portion, and the elder daughter naturally came in for the lioness's share. He remembered his sister, Johane Harte, with money and with his wearing apparel and the right to continue



in the occupancy of the dwelling house in Henley Street, and he left money to each of her three sons. There was ten pounds for the poor of the town; "to Mr. Thomas Combe my sword"; money to buy a ring to Hamlett Sadler, "and to my fellowes John Hemynges, Richard Burbage, and Henry Cundell, xxvjs a piece to buy them ringes," this being an interlineation, therefore not a forethought. To Judith he gave his "broad silver gilt bole." The executors were Doctor Hall and his wife.

Probably we should not have heard much about the will if the commentators had not seen fit to make use of another interlineation as a stick wherewith to belabour the memory of Mrs. William. Shakespeare bequeathed "unto my wief my second best bed with the furniture," which may very well have had tender memories for them both. What provision for her maintenance was made we do not know. But we do know that, as he had no son, it would be Shakespeare's desire to establish his elder daughter as the head of the family; with that end in view, what better course could he have pursued than to leave practically all to her, knowing that she would take tender care of her mother? Also, this course would mean the saving of much legal bother and expense when the mother died. We have no evidence to support the view that there was ill-feeling or coldness between Shakespeare and his wife. She lived on until August, 1623, dying at the age of 67.

Shakespeare, the full-blown man, was a comely fellow; a pleasant, witty companion, gentle mannered; speaking, most likely, with a touch of Warwickshire brogue. Fond of the good things of life, wine, women and song, but not, so far as we know, indulging to excess in the first two. A fair actor and an admirable critic of acting; a shrewd theatrical manager, and in his business affairs keen and astute.

To his literary work there are two sides: the poetic and the dramatic. As an emotional poet he is without rival. As a writer of prose he is among the most worthy.



As a dramatist he excelled in depicting tragic and comic emotions and in the drawing of character. In the conduct of a plot he was careless.

It is difficult to *see* Shakespeare's self because of the multitudinous interpreters who have set themselves between us and his nobility. I hope I have not added to the obscurity.

# APPENDIX

## CHART OF SHAKESPEARE'S LIFE AND WORK

YEAR.	AGE.	EVENTS.	WORKS.
1564		April 26, W. S. BAPTISED.	
1566	2	Oct. 13, Brother Gilbert, bpt.	
1569	5	April 15, Sister Jone, bpt.	
1571	7	W.S. may have entered Stratford-on-Avon Grammar School.	
„		September 28, Anna, d. of "Magistre" S., bpt.	
1573	9	Oct. 6, Southampton, b. Aunt Margaret Arden d.	
1573-4		Mar. 11, Brother Richard, bpt	
1577	13	W. S. may have left school.	
1578	14	Father's fortunes begin to decline.	
1579	15	April 4, Anna buried.	
1580	16	May 3, Edmund S. bpt. Dec. 29, Grandmother Arden buried.	

YEAR.	AGE.	EVENTS.	WORKS.
1582	18	W. S. married. Two entries in Episcopal Registry at Worcester, dated Nov. 27 and 28.	
1583	19	May 26, W. S.'s first child, Susanna, baptised.	
1584-5	20	Feb. 2, Hamnet and Judith, twins, baptised.	
1585	21	W. S. <i>may</i> have gone up to London, but there are no <i>facts</i> from 1585 to 1592.  *   *   *   *	
1590	26	[Dates of the works are chiefly according to Dowden's conjectures. It is the <i>order</i> of production that really matters.]	Titus Andronicus.
„			Love's Labour's Lost.
1591	27		1st Henry VI.
„			Comedy of Errors.
1592	28	Greene's attack on, and Settle's defence of W. S. (Probably a fact.)	Two Gentlemen. 2nd and 3rd Henry VI.
1593	29	June 1, Marlowe murdered. Venus dedicated to Southampton.	Venus and Adonis. Richard III.
1594	30	Lucrece ded. to Southampton	Lucrece. Midsummer Night's. Richard II.
1595	31	[Sonnets 1595 to 1605 according to Dowden; Lee says about 1594. <i>I</i> say we don't know.]	Romeo and Juliet. King John.

YEAR.	AGE	EVENTS.	WORKS
1596	32	Aug. 11, Hamnet S. buried.	Merchant of Venice.
„		Draft Coat of Arms. Assessed on property in St. Helens.	
1597	33	May 4, New Place bought.	1st Henry IV. 2nd „ „ Taming of the Shrew.
1598	34	More's Palladis Tamia reference.	Merry Wives. Much Ado.
1599	35	Coat of Arms granted. Globe Theatre founded.	Henry V. As You Like It. [Passionate Pilgrim.]
1600	36	Aug. 28, Nephew William Hart bpt.	[Phoenix and Turtle.]
1601	37	Sept. 8., W. S.'s father buried. Essex Rebellion.	Julius Cæsar All's Well.
1602	38	May 1, S. purchases more land at Stratford.	Hamlet.
1603	39	March 24, Elizabeth, d.	Measure for Measure.
„		May 17—19, James's Patent to S.'s Company.	Troilus & Cressida (?)
„		June 5, Niece Mary Hart, bpt.	
„		Dec. 2, Globe Co. act at Wilton before James.	
1604	40	W. S. in Silver Street, and earlier.	Othello.
1605	41	July 24, W. S. buys share of Stratford Tithes.	Lear.
1606	42	Allusions to W. S. in Return from Parnassus.	Macbeth.

YEAR.	AGE.	EVENTS.	WORKS.
1607	43	June 5, Susanna m. Dr. Hall.	Anthony & Cleopatra.
"		Dec. 17, Niece Mary Hart, buried.	Timon.
"		Dec. 31, Ed. S. buried in St. Saviour's, Southwark.	
1608	44	Feb. Granddaughter Elizabeth, born.	Coriolanus.
"		Sept. 9, Mother of W. S. buried.	Pericles.
"		Sept. 23, Nephew Michael Hart, bpt.	
"		Oct. 19, W. S. stands godfather to W. Walker, at Stratford.	
1609	45	"Sonnets" published.	Cymbeline
1610	46		Tempest.
1610-12		? S. Retires to Stratford.	
1611	47		Winter's Tale.
1612	48	Feb. 4, Death of Richard S.	Henry VIII.
"		March 10, Buys House in Blackfriars.	
1613	49	June 29, Globe burned down.	
"		Impress for Duke of Rutland.	
1616	52	Feb. 19, Judith S. m. Th Quiney.	
		March 25, S.'s Will signed.	
		April 17, Sister Jone's husband buried.	
		April 25, W. S. buried.	

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*Note.—No attempt is made to be exhaustive, only to be a general guide to this book.*

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